

RECEPTIVE SPIRIT



I D I O M

INVENTING WRITING THEORY

Jacques Lezra and Paul North, series editors

RECEPTIVE SPIRIT

GERMAN IDEALISM AND THE DYNAMICS
OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

MÁRTON DORNBACH

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INTRODUCTION: IDEALISM AND FINITUDE

CATCHING THEN BECOMES A POWER

According to a scholarly truism, the characteristic gesture of modernity is the undertaking to start anew with a clean slate. In view of the abundant evidence favoring this view, it seems all the more remarkable that some of the boldest works of modern thought begin by citing a precursor. To mention only a few prominent examples, Kant borrows the epigraph to the *Critique of Pure Reason* from Bacon, Heidegger's *Being and Time* opens with a quote from Plato, and Wittgenstein sets the stage for the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* with quotes from Ferdinand Kürnberger and Johann Nestroy, respectively. Although each of these thinkers sets out to renew thinking in a way that requires a break with received canons of inquiry, their opening acts of quotation bear witness to an understanding that the words of previous authors remain indispensable for orientation.

Among the philosophical classics that acknowledge this constraint through their very manner of commencing Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* deserves special mention, for its defense of tradition is prefaced with an epigraph that enacts and allegorizes this very theme. Written in the wake of the traumatic ruptures inflicted by two world wars, Gadamer's book argues that the cultural past orientates us through varieties of hermeneutic experience that precede all methodical inquiry and make possible in the first place the freedom of rational thought. At the beginning of *Truth*

and Method, between the table of contents and the introduction, the reader finds a passage attributed to “R. M. Rilke,” without any further specification. The verses stem from an untitled poem that Rilke wrote in 1922, a mere few days before the celebrated bout of inspiration that enabled him to complete the *Duino Elegies*:

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is	Solang du Selbstgeworfnes fängst, ist alles
mere skill and little gain;	Geschicklichkeit und läßlicher Gewinn—;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball	erst wenn du plötzlich fänger wirst des Balles,
thrown by an eternal partner	den eine ewige Mitspielerin
with accurate and measured swing	dir zuwarf, deiner Mitte, in genau
towards you, to your center, in an arch	gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen
from the great bridgebuilding of God:	aus Gottes großer Brückenbau
why catching then becomes a power—	erst dann ist Fangen-können ein Vermögen
not yours, a world's. ¹	Nicht deines, einer Welt. ²

Gadamer does not comment on the meaning of the epigraph, a reticence suggesting that nothing less than the magisterial argument prefaced by Rilke's verses could do justice to them. Perhaps for this reason the epigraph has attracted relatively little in the way of sustained discussion. Most commentators who take the trouble to mention it at all do so in a perfunctory fashion. Typical in this regard is the reading proposed by Gadamer's biographer Jean Grondin, who construes the epigraph as a lyrical polemic against the arrogant claims made on behalf of the Cartesian cogito, that familiar bogeyman of modern philosophy.³ There is obviously much to recommend this broad-brushed interpretation. Rilke's lines undoubtedly evoke the sense of impoverishment that has haunted Western modernity ever since Descartes's attempt to ground humans' rapport with the world in the self-relation of the thinking subject.

There is, however, an intertextual echo at the heart of the epigraph which suggests that the target of the thought rehearsed in the poem is less generic than Grondin would have it. Unless we are willing to assume sheer coincidence, Rilke

is catching and throwing back a ball that issued from Schiller's hands more than a hundred years earlier, and which had originally been thrown by Fichte. The image unfolded in Rilke's poem can be traced back to a letter written by Schiller to Goethe in October 1794. There Schiller made an exasperated remark about Fichte, whose pathbreaking *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* had just been published: "For him the world is just a ball that has been thrown by the I and which it catches again in the act of reflection!!"⁴ The same image appears in one of the distychs coauthored by Goethe and Schiller: "Children throw the ball unto the wall and catch it again;/ But I praise the game when a friend is throwing the ball back to me."⁵

Although the editor of the authoritative Hamburg edition of Goethe's works quite plausibly reads this distych as a comment on the happy collaboration between the two poets, it also resonates with several other pieces in the same collection that playfully engage with idealist philosophy. Indeed it clearly shares its polemical target with Schiller's original objection to Fichte's theory of the subject. Radicalizing Kant's claim that our sensible receptivity to the world must be mediated by the self-determining, or as Kant puts it "spontaneous," activity of thought, Fichte advanced the striking thesis that knowledge of the world is underwritten by nothing other than spontaneous thought. Schiller's analogy to a solitary ball game squarely equates this notion with solipsism. The objection registers a growing distance between Schiller and his less established but more popular junior colleague at the university of Jena, who was around this time eager to place an essay in Schiller's journal *Die Horen* (*The Horae*). When disagreements between the two finally surfaced a few months later, this episode in the perennial dispute between poets and philosophers also heralded a parting of ways between Weimar Classicism and Jena idealism.⁶

Instead of taking sides in the debate on such a general level, however, Rilke's lines take up the specific objection raised by Schiller concerning the proper manner in which the human mind should understand its stance toward the world. As an imaginative elaboration of Schiller's critique of Fichte, the poem turns on the word *power* (*Vermögen*) at the end of the penultimate line cited by Gadamer, which also happens to be the technical term for mental faculties used in Kantian transcendental philosophy. By anchoring experience in the power of the world to give—a giving whose generous arc (*Bogen*) is almost imperceptibly traced by the enjambment between "Mitspielerin" and "dir"—Rilke calls into question the idealist emphasis placed upon the mind's constitutive activity. In the face of the idealist paradigm, then, Rilke's lines suggest that our projections of meaning presuppose a basic receptivity toward the world that preexists our

thinking. Experience becomes fruitful, or so the poem intimates, only if we relinquish the conceit that through acts of reflection we might come to see the world as a mere product of our own constitutive activity.

Against the background of the argument unfolded in the subsequent course of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's invocation of the Rilke poem may be taken to link a central issue of hermeneutics—where does meaning originate and how does it become accessible to humans?—to the epistemological problem at stake in the disagreement between Fichte and Schiller. As the epigraph anticipates, it is specifically against the German idealist notion of the spontaneously active subject that Gadamer will unfold his vision of hermeneutic experience, premised as it is on our receptivity toward the inherited languages, traditions, and artifacts in terms of which we have come to understand ourselves. Indeed, Gadamer's commitment to this notion of receptivity is evident from the very gesture of beginning with a literary quotation that itself refers back to an earlier statement. Yet Gadamer's opening quote also shows the limits of his readiness to listen. By truncating the poem—and indeed truncating the last of the verses he quotes—Gadamer violates the integrity of the text that he is receiving here. Without signaling the incompleteness of the quote, and indeed dispensing even with quotation marks, Gadamer silently drops the second, longer, half of the poem. The omitted half celebrates the responsive agency of the mind as it throws back what the world has thrown:

"And if you even	"Und wenn du gar
had the strength and	zurückzuwerfen Kraft und
courage to throw it	Mut besäßeſt
back,	
no, more marvellously	nein, wunderbarer: Mut
yet: if you forgot	und Kraft vergäßeſt
courage and strength	
and had already	und ſchon geworfen
thrown.... (as the	hätteſt.... (wie das Jahr
year throws the birds,	die Vögel wirft, die
the ſwarms of	Wandervogelſchwärme
migrating birds,	
flung by an older to a	die eine ältere einer jungen
young warmth	Wärme

over the seas—) only	hinüberschleudert über Meere—) erst
through such daring can you play along in a way that is valid.	in diesem Wagnis spielst du gültig mit.
You then no longer make the throw easier for yourself; nor	Erleichterst dir den Wurf nicht mehr; erschwerst
any more difficult. From your hands issues	dir ihn nicht mehr. Aus deinen Händen tritt
the meteor and speeds into its spaces...	das Meteor und rast in seine Räume... ⁷

When one considers the way in which these lines complement the image of reception envisioned in the first half, their omission by Gadamer cannot but appear significant. To be sure, the upshot of the omitted lines is less readily clear than that of the lines quoted by Gadamer. Rilke first extends the allegory of the ball play and then immediately corrects and at the same time intensifies this extension (*nein, wunderbarer*) by suggesting that the “strength and courage” evident in the subject’s reciprocating agency are not virtues yet to be mustered so much as powers that must always already be in self-forgetful play. Poetic form follows this expansion of the initial argument as the neatly alternating rhymes of the first eight verses give way to the less predictable rhyme scheme of the second half. The concluding verse about the meteor that “speeds into its spaces,” with its unexpected slant rhyme followed by an ellipsis, combines a sense of finality with a suggestion of open-endedness. The overall movement of the poem may be taken to convey the idea that our ability to catch and fling back what the world has thrown us stems from a primordial and impersonal act of projection.

As it should be clear from Rilke’s use of the simile of migrant birds driven by the seasons, there can be no question here of returning to the sort of subjective idealism to which Schiller took exception in such strong terms. Still, Rilke’s way of developing the opening image of reception appears to present an unwelcome complication for Gadamer. Following eight verses that describe and imitate the play of throwing and catching, Gadamer’s quotation ends with a truncated line that falls out of this pattern and leaves the last word to what Gadamer sees as the origin of all hermeneutic interplay: “a world.” For the world, as Gadamer will

go on to argue, is not something that we project with “daring” (Rilke’s *Wagnis*) but a historical horizon of intelligibility that linguistically endowed finite beings must accept if they are to make any sense at all of their lives. The epigraph violates this demand in the very act of asserting it.

Thanks to Gadamer’s opening quote, the reader who approaches his book finds herself right at the outset in the midst of a silent negotiation between the impulse to assert human spontaneity and the need to maintain receptive openness in one’s experience. Spanning 165 years and arising from iterated gestures of reception, the web of allusions just delineated bears witness to the persistence of a tension between the idea of the spontaneously active subject at the heart of German idealism and the notion that human experience is fundamentally receptive. It is neither possible nor necessary to give a comprehensive overview here of the genesis of this tension out of the major conceptual shifts and innovations of Western modernity. For the present purposes it suffices to note a key development in Renaissance humanism, namely, the conjunction of the Platonic-Aristotelian insight that the human animal does not have a fixed nature with the Christian view of the human being as the lesser image of a creative, omnipotent god. Combining these notions, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola inverted the scholastic principle that “the operation of anything follows the mode of its being” and proclaimed that humans were free to give themselves a determinate nature through active self-fashioning.⁸ In the course of early modernity, all areas of human culture were brought under the purview of the principle of human self-determination. In a process charted by Hans Robert Jauss, first technical invention and mathematical knowledge, then the arts, and finally history too came to be seen as products of the human mind. This transformation was paralleled by the progressive liberation of the concept of *poiesis* from the constraints of merely reproductive labor and from the humble imitation of preexisting models.⁹ The redefinition of the human being as a second creator culminated in Giambattista Vico’s claim that we understand that which we make, and first and foremost the realm of history.¹⁰

German idealist philosophy from Kant to Hegel may be seen as a series of increasingly ambitious attempts at explicating the idea of productive mental activity at the heart of the emergent self-understanding of Western modernity.¹¹ This project of clarification was made all the more urgent by the upheavals experienced by Europeans in the decades following 1789. The dramatic events of that period drove home the fact that the authority of the norms governing human life could no longer be justified by recourse to sources external to the human being. To explain why humans were committed to certain moral principles, why

they took reality to consist of mathematizable physical objects and not Platonic ideas, or why they considered *Don Quixote* a work of enduring worth, it was no longer enough to appeal to innate ideas, received wisdom or the tribunal of experience. All such attempts at justification beg the question of why we should treat such putative givens as authoritative in the first place, and every attempt at justifying our commitments in this regard must eventually invoke our own self-determining activity as thinking subjects.

Assuming that a satisfactory answer along these lines is possible at all—and Kant and his followers believe it is—a further daunting question still persists. If the fundamental feature of our mental life is self-determining activity, how can we recover a sense of being open and responsive to the world in our diverse epistemic, ethical, political, and aesthetic orientations? German Idealist philosophy tends to stress the moment of agency in the mind's stance toward the world, conceiving of representation as something enacted rather than passively received by the mind. Within the conceptual framework defined by this conception of spontaneous subjectivity, it is difficult to account for our ineradicable sense that we often find or are found by the meanings that matter to us. Once the activistic view of understanding is asserted, the reader of a novella, the listener in a concert hall, the viewer of a painting find themselves faced with conflicting demands. On the one hand, our engagement with a meaningful artifact cannot count as a response *to* that artifact unless we are willing to adopt a posture of receptive openness with regard to the singular specificity of the object and allow ourselves to be determined by it. On the other hand, meaning does not simply emanate from the object of interpretation and is never just passively absorbed by a recipient. If meaning can be said to inhere in the object at all, it inheres there as a potentiality, usually one among many, whose actualization requires a capacity for active thought. How these two demands are to be reconciled can become a vexing question, even if we mostly go about our quotidian and professional practices without being paralyzed by it. It is when interpretations clash or intelligibility breaks down that the question forces itself upon us: if indeed we are the ones who make sense of that which strikes us as meaningful, can we still say that the meanings thus established pertain to that *of* which we make sense? Most schematically put, the difficulty concerns the conjunction of making and finding, or indeed founding and being found.

The difficulty is familiar from contemporary debates in the humanities. Some form or other of the opposition between receptivity and spontaneity is usually at work in attempts at getting clear about the stance that humanists ought to adopt toward their objects, as well as in admonitions about the pitfalls that they must

take care to avoid. To be sure, the alignment of putative alternatives with the dichotomy of receptivity and activity seems conspicuously unstable and varies from one polemical context to another. Some theoretical interventions would seem to confront humanists with a stark choice between a fidelity to facts that threatens to degenerate into sterile positivism and a celebration of the creative powers of humanistic study that can in the wrong hands veer into narcissistic willfulness, blinding one to the dense specificity of the artifacts under scrutiny. Yet the two conceptual oppositions—receptivity versus activity, disciplinary rigor versus subjective vagaries—can just as well be aligned the other way around. In that case the activity of thought becomes associated with systematic research following a method honed through the critical self-reflection of a particular discipline. In opposition to this scientific model it then becomes tempting to uphold receptivity as the prerogative of an avowedly subjective mode of criticism, one that surrenders the neutral standpoint of the observer to the authority of the object, inviting charges of naïveté or impressionism.¹²

These contestations ultimately concern the status, the applicability and indeed the very meaning of an elementary concept. The concept in question is that of experience. At issue here is not experience in the narrowly technical sense centered on cognition of the invariant and mathematizable order of nature, as envisioned in the modern natural sciences. Nor is it a question of that easily commodifiable sphere of immediate lived experience for which the term *Erlebnis* was coined in the nineteenth-century German context. Rather, our question concerns experience as a constituent of humans' historically changing self-understanding. The very possibility of experience so understood becomes problematic once German idealism takes on a historicized shape in the works of the post-Kantians—a problematic that culminates in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, originally intended as a "science of the experience of consciousness."

The often unthinking use of the term *experience* in reference to our dealings with novels, commercials, musical performances, theoretical treatises, and urban landscapes rests on the assumption that our encounters with such human-made artifacts can be events of potentially transformative reception, of learning in the broadest sense of the term. That view, in its turn, is bound up with an understanding of the human animal as underdetermined by its natural endowment and hence in need of models and norms established and passed on by earlier generations. To recognize the cultural dimension of human life is to keep a question open that has been succinctly formulated by György Márkus: "What *happens* to us through our own makings?"¹³ Ever since Kant made spontaneity central to our self-understanding, modernity has been haunted by the anxiety that, very simply put, nothing can

happen to us any more, that our infinite capacity for making precludes any transformative reception of what others have made. In a far-ranging meditation set off by the realization that even the death of his own son has left his self-reliance intact ("Grief too will make us idealists"), Emerson suggests that a reader encountering a book may be no different from a cat chasing her own tail:

If you could look with her eyes you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate—and meantime it is only puss and her tail. How long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines, laughter and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance? A subject and an object—it takes so much to make the galvanic circuit complete, but magnitude adds nothing. What imports it whether it is Kepler and the sphere, Columbus and America, a reader and a book, or puss with her tail?¹⁴

Given this nightmarish impasse, it is difficult not to hear Emerson's trustful concluding words about a receptivity exceeding and preceding any particular gift as whistling in the dark. The persistence of scenarios of circularity and entrapment from Schiller through Emerson to Rilke suggests that the problem is too pervasive to be resolved through such forced cheerfulness. Since the human mind depends for its very constitution on inherited models and patterns of significance deposited in historically evolved languages and traditions, its capacity for active self-determination cannot be asserted at the expense of receptivity toward such repositories of meaning. Yet it is far from obvious how the conception of spontaneity developed by Kant and his successors can be reconciled with the moment of receptivity involved in cultural transmission. Nor is it obvious, however, that this tension must become an outright antinomy.

The purpose of my book is to show that the pressure to avoid that antinomy was a key driving force of theorizing in the German idealist context. In examining how authors writing in this context envisioned and enacted the dynamics of cultural transmission, my aim is to bring out a relatively neglected, yet highly important, strand in the endlessly complicated and fascinating story of the intellectual developments that led from Kant to Hegel.¹⁵ Throughout the chapters that follow, my focus will be on the dynamics of cultural transmission, that is, on the conjunction of receptivity and activity required for the transmission of human-made models of mindedness. By revisiting a decisive juncture in modern thought with a view to this problematic, I want to identify a range of approaches to the issue of cultural transmission whose availability to denizens of the early twenty-first century is hardly self-evident, but which

can nevertheless help us keep our bearings in the contemporary intellectual landscape.

My presentation of these models roughly follows chronological order. However, the organization of the chapters also reflects a thematic shift affecting the terms in which the problematic of cultural transmission is formulated. Chapters 1 and 2 are concerned with diachronic versions of the problem, that is, with attempts at reconciling cultural transmission with spontaneity on a historical scale, in relation to predecessors in one's area. In chapters 3 and 4, the focus will shift to a synchronic variant of the tension between spontaneity and receptivity, namely, the dynamics of the interaction between author and reader. Both the diachronic and the synchronic dimension of the problematic will be central to chapter 5 and the conclusion.

Let me complement this scheme now with a slightly more fleshed-out overview. Against the backdrop of the eighteenth-century discourse on originality and succession, chapter 1 argues for the inherently historical character of Kant's concept of taste and asserts on that ground, rectifying a long-standing interpretive tradition, that art has a systematically central role to play in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Since my argument for the latter claim is partly reconstructive and as such has affinities with certain post-Kantian models, it raises the question of how the autonomy of thought can be reconciled with succession in relation to a precursor thinker. Chapter 2 takes up this question by examining how the Kantian idea of "understanding an author better than he himself" is turned against Kant himself by his successors in the last decade of the eighteenth century. The key figure in this chapter is Fichte, whose work from the Jena period (1794–1799) also serves as a pivot between the diachronic and the synchronic chapters. Fichte's radical revision of Kantian philosophy gives rise to new difficulties attendant on the transmission of insight from author to reader. As the very possibility of communication is thrown into question, authors and readers find themselves faced with unusual challenges. Chapter 3 deals with this predicament as it arises in the works of Fichte. Responding to the impasse of Fichtean authorship, the texts from Friedrich Schlegel's early romantic period (1796–1800) adumbrate a radical strategy of literary communication, which will be the topic of chapter 4. In chapter 5, I turn to the dialectical alternative to Schlegel's dialogical model and examine the way of thinking about cultural transmission that emerges from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Whether the Kantian distinction between receptivity and spontaneity still has a bearing on our self-understanding today is the question I take up in my concluding engagement with John McDowell's recent revival of the German idealist legacy.¹⁶

THE KANTIAN PREMISES

Initial orientation requires that we first establish certain fundamental alternatives. To that end, the following sections present three theoretical frameworks. These conceptions may be called paradigmatic in the sense that they purport to resolve the tension between spontaneity and receptivity in the most basic terms. The first of these models, Kant's account of the reciprocally informing relation between sensibility and thought, takes up this problem at a level of abstraction that precludes overt attention to the problem of cultural transmission. The relevance of that topic, however, will become abundantly clear from the second model, which emerges in Hegel's critique of the Kantian conception, and even more so from the third option, which receives its most incisive formulation in Gadamer's response to Hegel. By rehearsing the debate among these three positions we can get a preliminary sense of the conceptual space within which the arguments of my authors unfold.

Not very surprisingly, then, we have to start by going back to Kant. The theory of knowledge developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is arguably the most intricate and influential attempt at working out the relationship between receptivity and activity in humans' mental life. Its pertinence to the issue outlined in the above should be immediately obvious from the fact that it gave the decisive impetus for the Fichtean conception repudiated by Schiller. To be sure, the broader implications of the Kantian theory tend to be obscured by the fact that Kant himself tended to state the problems he set out to resolve in highly specific terms. In a nutshell, these problems concerned the foundations and limits of experience and metaphysics, where the former is understood in a restrictive sense defined with a view to Newtonian natural science and the latter is taken to be the system of what we can know independently of experience so understood. Throughout the first *Critique*, Kant all but brackets the forms of experience through which cultural models are transmitted, appropriated, and reconfigured. Yet we shall see that the terms of Kant's attempted solution to these problems could not fail to inflect the ways in which issues of cultural experience and transmission are addressed in modernity.

It is obviously not possible to present the Kantian model here in its full complexity. Since, however, a dutiful summary rehearsing some putative scholarly consensus would give at best a semblance of intelligibility, I cannot avoid delving into some of the intricacies of Kant's relevant arguments. Although my construal of these details depends on an understanding of the deep structure of Kant's thinking that is anything but self-evident, my goal here is not to defend

that overall interpretation. Rather, I aim to show that these features of the Kantian model, far from being sterile technicalities, are fraught with issues of far-reaching importance for modernity (to use a deliberately broad formulation).

In keeping with that purpose, I begin by proposing a relatively simple framework for understanding Kant's well-known distinction between sensibility and discursive thought. On the view that I propose, this dichotomous model is underwritten by two basic premises. Although these premises are not explicitly stated by Kant, they nevertheless enjoy something of an axiomatic status in his thinking. The first premise stipulates that humans are ineluctably finite beings. The second one asserts that humans are nonetheless capable of objective knowledge. Taken together the two premises suggest that we are neither creators of the world nor passive recipients of its impingements. Not only do these elementary presuppositions shed light on numerous puzzling features of Kant's theory, they also help explain why Kant's highly technical theoretical model should have had such a widely ramifying impact on modern thinking about mind and culture.

In order to be properly understood, however, each of these premises has to be considered against the background of the other. To begin with the presupposition of finitude, its precise meaning can be formulated only within the framework defined by Kant's complementary assumption that, *qua* subjects of knowledge, we are not just objects in the world but self-conscious and active beings capable of making judgments about the world. The presupposition of finitude stipulates that we do not create that which we thus cognize. What we cognize is, rather, already there independently of us and therefore has to be given to us in order to be known (A19).¹⁷ What we know about the world is thus contingent in a double sense: it is contingent upon what exists independently of us and contingent upon how we can receive impingements of the latter. The latter form of contingency entails the doctrine that the object as it appears in the context of our knowledge must be distinguished from the same object as it exists in itself (the "thing-in-itself").

Although it is generally understood that this key distinction drawn by Kant registers an epistemic limitation, it takes considerable work to unpack the complex conception of the human standpoint that it implies. If the acknowledgment that our knowledge is contingent upon our standpoint expresses a sense of epistemic limitation then this is because our standpoint itself is fundamentally contingent. Although subjects of finite knowledge are not reducible to objects in the world that they cognize, they are not exactly looking at that world from a disengaged outside standpoint either; presumably, only the hypothetical cre-

ator of the world could occupy such a transcendent vantage point and still possess knowledge of the world. If a noncreative, receptive intellect is to know the world, it must be capable of being passively affected by its objects, and it cannot thus interact with worldly objects unless it is one of them, participating in the world of objects through the very act of knowing them. In short, a finite knower cannot maintain a standpoint upon the world unless it occupies a particular place within the world.

This place is contingent insofar as it simply happens to be the place that one occupies in the world, one among countless places from which the world can be viewed. What is meant by the word *place* here and in what precise sense is our place in the world contingent? Kant's conception of the human standpoint involves two related forms of contingency, which have to do with our status as members of a species and as individuals, respectively. A generic constraint upon our knowledge is imposed by the fact that the way in which we represent things is ineluctably a function of the type of worldly beings that we are, namely, human beings; and to that extent the phrase "our place in the world" designates features of our standpoint that are common to all humans. Famously, Kant holds that the peculiarity of the human standpoint constrains the manner in which sensible data pertaining to objects can be given to the human senses. Humans receive data under certain forms of sensibility peculiar to them that order all awareness of sensible contents: time for "inner" intuition of our mental states, time and space for "outer" intuition of the physical world. According to Kant, time and space are not features of mind-independent reality but universal subjective conditions of possibility of human receptivity or "sensible intuition" (*sinnliche Anschauung*). Although spatiotemporal form is necessary *for us humans*, it is contingent upon our peculiarly human constitution. Given that constitution, we can no more imagine what it would be like to intuit objects under forms of intuition different from ours than we can concretely imagine objects thus intuited. Nevertheless, reflecting upon the contingency of our forms of sensibility we are necessarily led to conceive the hypothetical thought of finite minds that intuit objects in a nonspatiotemporal manner.¹⁸

The generic constraint on our receptivity also informs the sense in which it is conditioned by our individual standpoint. The point of view of human knowledge is always the individuated vantage point of an embodied person occupying a singular spatiotemporal position, from which only a finite spatial range of objects and only a finite segment of time can be surveyed. On the reading that I am proposing, this is not just an empirical fact that could also conceivably be otherwise. We cannot form an intelligible idea of what it would be like to occupy

a standpoint belonging to no individual in particular, or one without a definite spatiotemporal position, or even a localizable but disembodied, geometrically conceived viewpoint. The metaphysical presupposition of finitude that structures Kant's entire model entails the idea that what it means to be a finite subject of knowledge is to be restricted to a mode of cognition that partially implicates us in the world of objects that we seek to know. This means that we cannot reflectively understand our own capacity to know in a noncircular manner—without, that is, considering at least some aspect of ourselves under the forms of representation characteristic of our mode of knowledge. Specifically, it is not possible for us to give a philosophical account of the standpoint from which we represent things in space and time without considering ourselves as embodied minds, beings whose standpoint is bound to an extended body occupying a singular spatiotemporal position. Considered as subjects of receptivity we are ourselves subject to our forms of receptivity.¹⁹

Taken in isolation, this doctrine of sensible receptivity would leave Kant's second basic premise—the assumption that we can, despite our finitude, obtain objective knowledge—unaccounted for. Since the sensibility of each finite human subject is wedded to a spatiotemporally singular, embodied standpoint, Kant is faced with the question of how disparate impressions registering in an individual's mind can be taken to disclose a state of affairs in the world that *every* subject should recognize as real. Some account is needed, in other words, of the capacities that enable us to refer sense data obtained at different times and different places to enduring objects that constitute a shared and mutually intelligible world. The doctrine of the understanding (*Verstand*) provides just such an account. At the heart of this doctrine is the claim that we bestow objective status upon disparate sense data through acts of thought, which are essentially acts of unification. By uniting a manifold of sense data in an act of synthesis, our mind forms the representation of an object. This type of unifying activity finds its paradigmatic expression in the judgment that things are one way and not another, that is, in the positing of a state of affairs that is in principle accessible to, and binding upon, all other subjects.

How such acts are possible is the question that puts Kant on the track to his key discovery. Famously, Hume sought in vain to explain the combinations underlying such judgments in terms of habits of mind formed through recurrent associations encountered in experience; and Kant recognizes that this sort of associationist account begs the question of why experience exhibits such ordered patterns in the first place, enabling us to understand nature in terms of the exceptionless laws of Newtonian physics. He concludes, therefore, that a

plausible theory of thought must explain how such combinations of sense data can be taken to be guided by a principle of necessity that precedes all experience (B127–128). The only way to provide such an explanation, he contends, is to suppose that the acts of combination performed upon sense data follow *a priori* rules that express universal conditions of mindedness, and which do not derive from experience but make experience possible in the first place. According to Kant, the rules in question can only be the most general concepts that we can form of objects *qua* objects. These concepts, which he calls categories following a tradition that reaches back to Aristotle, define the basic logical structures to which combinations of sense data must conform if they are to be recognizable as representations of objects of at all. Since objective knowledge is paradigmatically expressed in judgments, Kant reasons that the most elementary rules of unifications that constitute objects in this sense must correspond to the basic logical forms of judgment (A79).

This doctrine of the categories is intimately bound up with a theory of subjectivity. The linkage between the two is secured by Kant's revolutionary claim that the categories accounting for the logical structure of objects are none other than the rules governing the ordering activity that enables me to ascribe multiple contents of consciousness to a self-conscious "I" that is identical over time (A105). In other words, the categorial forms of objectivity are at the same time the conditions of possibility of finite subjectivity. Thus, when Kant attempts to ground the thesis that all knowledge must conform to the categorial forms of thought, the notoriously tangled argument for that claim—the "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories"—hinges on the foundational role of a basic kind of self-awareness that Kant terms "transcendental apperception." Kant argues that representation must involve a moment of active unification—what he calls thought—and that thought in this sense can take place only in an "apperceptive" manner. By "apperceptive" Kant means the condition expressed in the famous phrase, "The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations" (B131).

In asserting this principle Kant takes his guidance from the insight that the mere occurrence of a sensory episode never suffices for the representation of an object. Such an occurrence has to be combined with other mental states and referred to an object in an act of thought in order to count as a representation. Moreover, such synthesizing and judging can be characterized as active only insofar as I am capable of recognizing it as my own doing, that is, insofar as I can become aware of myself as the thinker who judges reality to be one way and not another in accordance with certain universally binding rules of representation. Finally, the requisite awareness of myself as the agent of my thought presup-

poses an implicit understanding of the rules that govern my thought, which can be brought to explicit awareness through reflection. To put it more generally, I cannot take a mental state to be a representation *of* an object unless I am capable of articulating an understanding of what constitutes a representation *to* me, *for* the kind of being that I am. The phenomenological corollary of this point is that the representations resulting from my synthetic agency “feel” necessary and objective just insofar as they are underwritten by an implicit background awareness of the categorial norms that I share with all finite subjects.

The above gloss on the principle of apperception is meant to underscore its difference from the reflexive thought “I think” that Descartes highlighted as the sole item of absolutely certain knowledge. The principle of apperception does not posit a distinct “consciousness of consciousness,” as though our representation of particular contents were constantly accompanied by a parallel representation of ourselves as representing subjects. Rather, the principle identifies the basic self-relation that grounds all explicit self-reflection. Apperception is thus not a separate representation but a *prereflexive* or *adverbial* feature of representational activity as such, a feature that consists in the fact that all such activity must occur in such a manner that it can always be brought to consciousness as *my* activity.²⁰ Furthermore, apperception is formal in the sense that the implied subject of the apperceptively performed mental activity is not an individual self with determinate psychological and biographical features but an instantiation of a universal type of subjectivity, a subject capable of judgments that hold true for all subjects.²¹ The “I” to which all contents of consciousness are referred through apperceptive representation is thus not a substantial entity to which the knower has direct and infallible access—as in the Cartesian cogito—but a purely formal function, a representation devoid of empirical content. As a formal condition of possibility of knowledge, the “I” is not itself an object of possible knowledge.

If the “I” denotes nothing but the numerically identical principle of activity (the “vehicle” of the categories, as Kant puts it in A341) grounding the synthetic unity of objects, conversely thought is nothing but the act of taking up a representation into the synthetic unity brought about by the “I” (A108).²² The categories are, accordingly, the forms of unification to which our sense data must conform if they are to yield objective representations that can be self-ascribed by someone capable of recognizing himself as a subject of knowledge in the formal sense stipulated by the apperception principle. The mind cannot think, and hence cannot represent, an object corresponding to a sensible manifold unless it has brought that manifold under the “I” as the uniform and universal principle of a rule-governed synthetic activity. Understood as the condition of possibility

of judgments of the form “I think that [this book weighs a pound],” apperceptive thought guided by the categories is the common condition of possibility of objective representation and self-consciousness.

A key feature of Kant’s conception comes into view when we ask how universal the categories are. Similarly to the spatiotemporal form of sensibility, the categories are not structures pertaining to the world as it exists in itself but conditions of possibility of knowledge—with a crucial difference, however. Whereas it is merely a brute fact about humans that they intuit the world in a spatiotemporal manner, the necessity of representing objects in conformity with the categories extends to all finite subjects *qua* subjects, whether human or nonhuman, regardless of the peculiar intuitional form of their receptivity.²³ Kant seems to assume that the categorially guided, unifying acts of thought could not enable a knower to abstract from the contingencies of her *individual* standpoint if they did not also abstract from the contingent *generic* forms of sensibility in terms of which human knowers are individuated. In other words, the categories constitute a logical order untainted by the generic contingency of space and time themselves. Support for the attribution of this thought to Kant may be drawn from his key assertion that the categories are not simply given in the way in which time and space are but products of what Kant calls “the spontaneity of thought” (A68), defined as the “power of producing representation from within itself” (A51). If the categories were not generated in such a self-active manner, undetermined by anything outside thought, then it would be difficult to see how they could remain unadulterated by features of our standpoint whose constraining role is a contingent fact about humans.

We may summarize Kant’s dualistic theory of knowledge as follows. The doctrine of sensible intuition follows from Kant’s acknowledgment of our epistemic finitude; it reflects the fact that there is more to the reality given to us than the way in which pure thought must determine *anything* that it can recognize as an object. The theory of apperceptive spontaneity expresses the complementary insight that finite knowledge requires synthesizing activity. If, that is, the world that we know is not our own creation but something given to us in the form of manifold sense data, then obtaining knowledge requires that our mind actively synthesize the given in conformity with the logical conditions under which representations can belong to a unified and identical subject committed to universal rules of representation.

To see that both sensible and discursive conditions must be met if our experiences are to be recognized as disclosures of reality, it is enough to imagine a scenario in which either of the two conditions remained unfulfilled. If the con-

tent of the synthesized representations did not derive from sensible intuition then representation could no longer be thought to be responsive to a mind-independent reality. However, if my representations could not be recognized as the results of discursive synthesis, they could not belong to a unitary consciousness, or as Kant writes, “they would be nothing to me” (B132). In neither case could my representations constitute anything that deserved to be called knowledge.

This way of putting the matter helps to bring out the toughest of the challenges facing Kant. Since the spatiotemporal form of sensible givenness and the categorial form of thought are independently defined, there is no guarantee that the sense data received spatiotemporally are actually amenable to the ordering activity of thought, guided by the categories. Otherwise put, the dualistic framework of Kant’s epistemology leaves open the possibility that the specifically human form of receptive awareness is at odds with the categorial conditions under which finite subjects of any kind can think objects. On the face of it, it appears at the very least conceivable that the logical order we impart to objects has nothing to do with what is given to us through our sensibility. If this were the case, the categorial order of thought would be something imposed upon the given. The representations resulting from this imposition would be mere figments of our own making inasmuch as they would distort the very form of what is given in our sensibility, straining the sense in which they could be said still to be representations of what is sensibly given. Or, to describe the lack of fit in reverse terms, our receptive awareness would fail to satisfy the categorial requirements of objective representation and hence fall short of presenting us with data that could be intelligibly construed as having objective import. Regardless of how this lack of fit is described, what its possibility threatens is not merely the truth of our representations (i.e., their adequacy to reality) but their intentionality, that is, their very power to be *about* reality.

To avert this threat, Kant needs to demonstrate that our sensible intuitions are so constituted in their very givenness that they cannot fail to conform to the forms of synthesis prescribed by the categories (B144–145). Kant tackles this challenge in the second-edition version of his notoriously convoluted “Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What Kant does here is remotely analogous to the gesture of reversal I have highlighted in my opening reading of the Rilke poem quoted by Gadamer. Correcting the impression created by his own manner of exposition up to that point, he now suggests that the distinction between the forms of sensibility and the forms of thought was made to appear sharp only for the purposes of exposition.

In fact, already the account of the forms of sensibility with which the first *Critique* opens presupposes that these forms cannot be neatly separated from the forms of thought. To make knowledge claims about spatiotemporal objects that are valid for everyone, irrespective of one's spatiotemporal standpoint, one must locate objects in a unitary and universally shared spatiotemporal framework. This in turn presupposes the capacity to represent the manifold fields of space and time as unities, that is, as merely formal "pure intuitions" (A20). However, it is difficult to see how the ground of the unity of space and time, respectively, could itself be spatiotemporal. Indeed in the concluding step of second edition version of the "Transcendental Deduction," Kant argues that, insofar as there is one and only one unitary space, and one and only one unitary time, both space and time already exhibit a latent categorial structure. They can function as unitary "forms of sensible intuition" only because they can also be brought to awareness in abstraction from particular sensible intuitions, as pure "formal intuitions," or what one might describe as abstract singular objects (B160–161). When we represent space and time abstractly, as we do when we engage in geometry and arithmetic, it becomes possible to see that space and time are unified, each a unitary field of experiencing that correlates with the unitary thinking "I." This unity is the product of a "synthetic effect of the understanding" upon the sensibility that Kant terms "figural synthesis" or "synthesis speciosa" and attributes to the productive imagination as a function of the understanding (B150–152). The resultant infusion of the spatiotemporal form of sensibility with a categorial order guarantees that all sensible contents given in space and time lend themselves to the explicit articulation of categorial order through the understanding's acts of judgment.

It is not the case, then, that *first* a purely nondiscursive, sensible intuition of the object is given in the sensibility and *then* the understanding imposes forms of discursive unity upon the manifold intuited in this way. To be sure, sensibility must precede discursivity insofar as categorial synthesis can only be performed upon a sensible manifold given in the intuition. However, it is equally true that sensibility is always already determined by the understanding, since the very form of our sensible receptivity is shaped by the most general concepts of what the mind takes to be an object. Hence the mind's receptivity to the given is always already informed by the mind's basic forms of active thought.²⁴

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF KANT

The basic tendency of Kant's argument in the "Transcendental Deduction" was well understood already by Fichte, who radicalized that tendency by attempting to relegate the givenness of objects ("the not-I," as he puts it) to a logical moment within the self-determining activity of the transcendental "I." I will have more to say about Fichte's conception in the relevant chapters of this study. At this preliminary stage a greater gain in clarity can be achieved by turning to Hegel, since it is Hegel who brings out most incisively the radical implications of Kant's argument. In his early treatise "Faith and Knowledge," Hegel argues that Kant's attempted solution undercuts the very terms in which Kant posed the problem he sought to remedy.²⁵ For the argument of the "Transcendental Deduction" relativizes, if it does not altogether erase, the putatively sacrosanct distinction between the sensibility and the understanding, and therewith falls the assumption of a metaphysical gulf between that which is given to thought and thought's own self-determining activity. It is important for Hegel that the blurring of the boundary between the two occurs at the expense of sensibility. As Hegel sees it, Kant's argument ends up assimilating our sensible receptivity to the spontaneous, apperceptive side of our cognitive apparatus. According to Hegel, this move undermines the very terms of the settlement by which critical philosophy adjudicates the respective claims of receptivity and spontaneity.

If the young Hegel's relevant discussion is more polemical than appreciative in tone it is because he thinks that Kant shrank back from acknowledging the implication of his own argument. Doing so would have brought down Kant's architectonic edifice and, more importantly, required Kant to abandon his modest notion of a fixed and finite human standpoint (that of Kant's "dear mankind," as Hegel sarcastically puts it).²⁶ The key dichotomies must therefore remain in place. Although in the "Transcendental Deduction," Kant allows for a partial determination of the forms of sensibility by the forms of thought, he stops short of the more radical claim that space and time are nothing but constructs of thought. The price exacted by Kant's timidity is that his argument makes it a contingent fact that the forms of sensibility we humans happen to be equipped with are amenable to discursive ordering.²⁷ In order to demonstrate the necessity of this agreement Hegel thinks that we need to abandon Kant's excessively modest philosophy of finitude in favor of a bolder, and at the same time more consistently critical, vision, one that no longer presumes that thought is constrained by anything given from without.

Such is the vision that Hegel develops in his mature works. In the “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel’s critique of the epistemological tradition opens with a ruthless debunking of the premise that underpins Kant’s understanding of both sides of our cognitive endowment. If the doctrine of sensibility presupposes that our sensibility is a passive medium through which the light of knowledge is refracted, in a corresponding manner the doctrine of the understanding assumes that our intelligence is an active instrument that alters its object in the very act of accessing it. Common to the two doctrines is the presupposition that the mind and the reality it seeks to know belong to separate ontological domains and that knowledge requires the gulf between them to be bridged by representational means. That premise, a piece of dogmatic metaphysics according to Hegel, condemns us to the frustration of finitude. Whether the mediating representations are thought to arise from the refraction of the light of knowledge or from the shaping agency of our conceptual apparatus, in neither case can we avoid the conclusion that knowledge distorts the truth. For Hegel starts out from the radically anti-Kantian assumption that our knowledge claims cannot count as true unless they capture the way things are absolutely, that is, irrespective of any particular standpoint. Hegel dismisses the Kantian idea of a nonabsolute truth that is valid “for us” as an obfuscation, insisting that nothing less than the absolute truth will satisfy consciousness. And if the latter is to be knowable then it cannot lie on the far side of a gulf on whose near side the mind is stranded. It follows from this that knowledge cannot be construed as the mind’s relation to some irreducibly external other.

Accordingly, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows each and every finite model of consciousness premised on the idea of an external constraint to be self-defeating, with the refutation of each finite model contributing to a more elaborate idea of the alternative envisioned by Hegel. The crux of this radical alternative emerges at the end of the section on “Force and the Understanding.”²⁸ By this point, the candidate models that took truth to be attainable through immediate sensory awareness and through perception of objects defined by universal properties, respectively, have already been set aside on account of their internal contradictions. Now Hegel turns to the next-best model, which incorporates the lessons learned from the breakdown of its precursors. According to this new model, we obtain the truth by using our understanding (*Verstand*) to peer beneath appearances and grasp the “supersensible” inner character of things. Through a series of intricate moves, Hegel shows that the perceived phenomena and the intrinsic character of reality are both in the final analysis determinations posited by thought itself. Consequently, when we infer the intrinsic char-

acter of reality from its appearance in order then to explain the latter in terms of the former, such explanation amounts to a tautological movement in which consciousness distinguishes between two moments only to cancel their distinction. Far from being a metaphysical given, the difference between appearance and inner essence—and, by extension, the very difference between subject and object—can now be grasped as an “inner difference” of thought. It is, in other words, a relation whose two poles have no independent reality because each is defined by its opposition to the other. The two poles are distinct precisely inasmuch as they lack substantial independence and are moments of the same movement. In what is a hallmark example of Hegel’s speculative dialectics, the opposition between the two poles becomes a pulsation between distinction and sameness, “a repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself and likeness of the unlike as unlike.”²⁹

To the extent that all difference between being and thought is thus taken up within the self-differentiating movement of thought, thought can now grasp itself as an “infinity” that is not bounded by anything outside itself.³⁰ And since it is the inner difference of thought that gives rise to “the difference of the *thing itself*,” the former must now be recognized as the “absolute difference.” According to Hegel, this speculative conception obviates the vexing question of how the difference between subject and object might have first arisen out of the pristine unity of being.³¹ For now that being is no longer thought to have the character of inert, positive substantiality, the duality of subject and object can be grasped in terms of the negativity of the “inner” or “absolute” difference through which the infinite substance-subject relates to itself. Under the pressure exerted by Hegel’s method of phenomenological testing, what appears in our finite experience as consciousness of a mind-independent reality given from outside turns out to be, in the final analysis, self-consciousness.³² As Hegel will make clear in the opening of the “Reason” chapter, this sublation of externality cannot mean that self-consciousness now entirely displaces consciousness of objects. Rather, it is a matter of grasping consciousness of objects as a necessary moment in the movement of self-consciousness.³³

In his late summation, the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel distills his objections to the Kantian idea of mind-independent constraint to a concise and seemingly incontrovertible argument. Advanced in §60 of the *Encyclopedia*, the argument has come to be known as “dialectic of the limit.”³⁴ The movement it describes arises in an inevitable manner whenever consciousness ventures the necessary step beyond simply positing an external constraint on its activity (what Kant calls the thing-in-itself) and reflects on the preconditions of

such positing. As Hegel points out, such a self-limitation of consciousness is possible only if consciousness already possesses some minimally determinate idea of what lies beyond the limit recognized by it. In other words, the bounds within which consciousness retreats, in an act of self-critical modesty, are not insuperable barriers but frontiers whose far side is still, in some minimal yet sufficiently determinate way, known to consciousness.

Once the idea of a mind-independent constraint is abandoned, the correlative idea of a contingently limited standpoint within and upon the world can no longer be maintained either. Accordingly, in the *Encyclopedia* Hegel reproaches Kant for not having gone far enough in his critique of dogmatic metaphysics. What Kant failed to recognize is that every claim about the ways in which our specifically human standpoint conditions our knowledge is itself already a piece of human knowledge.³⁵ Such claims are question-begging inasmuch as they presuppose the very conditions that they purport to establish. Indeed to the extent that such claims about the peculiarity of our standpoint cannot but relativize their own validity, they are not merely question-begging but actually self-undermining.

Following the idea of determinate negation developed in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, however, this self-cancellation of reflective claims about our standpoint is not a purely negative outcome. Because any determinate insight about the limitations of our standpoint enables, and indeed compels, us to attempt a correction for those limitations, the very act by which we draw the boundaries of what is accessible from the human standpoint furnishes us with the leverage needed for moving beyond those boundaries. Kant's modest notion of a fixed standpoint constrained by brute facts about human nature thus gives way to an inherently historical conception of self-transcending mindedness (designated by the term *Spirit*).³⁶ Accordingly, experience for Hegel is not the passive apprehension and active synthesis of raw data about a mind-independent reality, as in Kant's epistemology, but the critical self-transformation of the subject.

Hegel's repudiation of externality and the consequent recasting of the concept of experience already define, in fact, the very project of the *Phenomenology*, as well as its dialectical method. In the "Introduction" Hegel famously claims that, contrary to the internal or "natural" understanding of experience as an encounter with something given from outside, the true meaning of experience lies in a corrective adjustment of the self-conception of consciousness. According to Hegel, however, this transformation takes place "behind the back of consciousness" and is grasped only from "our" perspective.³⁷ The pronoun *we* that Hegel uses to refer to the standpoint of phenomenological observation stands for the recognitive

community of subjects that has already completed the entire series of these transformations and can thus look back upon all figures of consciousness as necessary, and necessarily one-sided, precursors of itself. At the heart of Hegel's conception of experience we thus find a temporalized chiasm between inside and outside. From the inside of consciousness, experience at any given point is construed as an encounter with something that lies "out there," and it is only from *our* standpoint, a standpoint external to the immanence of experience, that experience can be grasped as a process of self-transformation internal to consciousness. Our outside standpoint is, however, none other than the one that finally emerges from the self-transformation of consciousness, the process through which putative externalities are progressively internalized. Because Hegel's account of this process supposedly encompasses all possible forms of mindedness, it ends up enlarging the scope of the pronoun *we* to the point where all forms of mindedness become internal to it. It thus leaves no room for genuinely other outlooks either in the past or in other individuals, communities and cultures.³⁸

GADAMER'S REVERSAL OF HEGEL

Borrowing Rilke's expression, one might say that Hegel's dialectical reasoning reveals every putative form of otherness to be something "thrown by ourselves" (*Selbstgeworfenes*). The dialectic of the limit thus returns us to the issue raised by the epigraph to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. In fact, the Hegelian argument stands in the forefront of a pivotal chapter in that book which deals with "effective-historical consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*). Developing the critique of idealism suggested by the epigraph, Gadamer here insists on the receptivity of hermeneutic experience against the boundless reflexivity of the Hegelian spirit.³⁹

The line of thought unfolded in this chapter has an important precedent, less removed in time than the idealist theme evoked by the epigraph of the book. Gadamer's engagement with Hegel may be seen as a late ramification of a highly consequential debate about the German Idealist legacy whose emblematic moment occurred three decades earlier, at the Davos disputation between the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the young Martin Heidegger in March 1929. Although that debate, attended by some of the leading luminaries of the period, ostensibly centered on questions having to do with the interpretation of Kant, its real stakes were far more comprehensive.⁴⁰ An authoritative representative of the neo-Kantian orthodoxy of the period, Cassirer sought to defend a reading of Kant that vindicated an Enlightenment faith

in the world-making power of human spontaneity and in our capacity to achieve truth through scientific investigation. By contrast, Heidegger's interpretation amounted to a radical critique of the rationalist aspirations at the heart of Kantian philosophy, one that must have had a profound impact on how his disciple Gadamer would approach German idealism.

Heidegger's interpretation of Kant was a decisive move in his vast undertaking to dismantle or "destructure" a philosophical tradition that had held Western thought captive and whose key concepts persistently concealed the very source of intelligibility from which they sprang.⁴¹ As Heidegger saw it, the *Critique of Pure Reason* afforded both a rare access to a primordial understanding of our finitude and a uniquely instructive example of how such understanding becomes occluded by the regnant conceptual framework of modern philosophy. In particular, Heidegger brought hermeneutic pressure to bear on some of Kant's most obscure claims—the doctrine of temporal schematism, the suggestion that the imagination constituted the hidden common root of sensibility and thought, and the idea of respect for the moral law—to construe them as intimations of a radical ontology of finitude from which Kant himself shrank back in the second edition of his work. At these points of radical questioning and recoil, Heidegger's reading of Kant opened up an unsettling perspective from which metaphysics was no longer an anchoring but an abyss. On this view, man's humanity could no longer be taken for granted but had to be thought as the site of a perpetually fraught, tacit understanding of Being that takes the form of finding oneself "thrown" into an opaque and unmasterable situation out of which meaning must be projected.⁴² Applied to Kant, the Heideggerian destruction of the philosophical tradition thus brought to light a radical conception of historicity. Not unlike the young Nietzsche's reflections on history, Heidegger's account posed a somber challenge to the human sciences of the period—and especially to their optimism about the advancement of freedom through knowledge.

Heidegger's interpretations of Kant also set the agenda for his engagement with Hegel. In his Kant book as well as in lectures given at around the same time, Heidegger repeatedly suggested that Kant's recoil from his insight into finitude resulted in a privileging of logic that paved the way for Hegel's speculative assertion of the infinitude of Spirit.⁴³ To counter that assertion, in his 1942/1943 essay on "Hegel's Concept of Experience," Heidegger applied considerable hermeneutic violence to free up the Hegelian conception of experience from the straightjacket of a dialectical logic and to recast it in ontological terms.⁴⁴

It is Heidegger's comprehensive challenge to the German idealist privileging of spontaneity that defines the orientation of his student Gadamer as he

develops the argument of *Truth and Method* during the 1950s. For Gadamer, however, the principal interlocutor is no longer Kant but Hegel. Heidegger's incisive presentation in Davos marked the eclipse of neo-Kantian orthodoxy, which appeared to lack the resources needed to address the pervasive sense of crisis afflicting the Western world. Meanwhile, the upheavals of the first half of the century led to a Europe-wide revival of interest in Hegel's radically historicized brand of idealism, as evidenced by the work of Benedetto Croce, Georg Lukács, Jean Wahl, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite.

Given this altered landscape, it is not surprising that Gadamer should direct his polemic against Hegel's historically elaborated thesis about the unboundedness of spirit and not against the more modestly conceived Kantian defense of Enlightenment reason. Whereas Kant took pains to demarcate the theory of knowledge from reflection on practical agency and teleology, Hegel's thoroughly historicized philosophy purports to give a unified account that transcends such architectonic divisions. This is an aspiration of Hegel's that Gadamer endorses. Moreover, Hegel's project is a key source of inspiration for what Robert Pippin has described as "Gadamer's two-pronged hermeneutical attack on transcendentalism and relativism."⁴⁵ These affinities make it all the more important for Gadamer to position his thinking vis-à-vis Hegel's. By directing his polemic against Hegel, rather than Kant, Gadamer can formulate his objections to the idealist philosophy of spontaneity in comprehensive terms that bear directly on the predicament of the human sciences around the middle of the twentieth century.

For Gadamer would not be troubled by Hegel's argument if its scope were limited to epistemology. He correctly sees, however, that the Hegelian assertion of absolute knowledge has momentous implications for the disciplines that seek to make sense of our experience as beings of culture. Questions regarding the ways in which the mind is actively self-determining or receptive vis-à-vis its objects tend to arise not only in epistemological reflection upon our knowledge of nature but also in the context of our engagement with meaningful artifacts. On what one might call the ordinary view that tacitly underpins so many cultural practices, our engagement with such objects—whether that engagement be interpretive, aesthetic, or critical—must be constrained and guided by our receptivity to their sensible particularity, their formal features, and the meanings associated with them. Yet the Hegelian conception appears to undercut the possibility of thinking of ourselves as receptive toward cultural artifacts. To put the point in terms of the epigraph of *Truth and Method*, Hegelian idealism denies that we can ever catch a ball that was not thrown by us in the first place.

If, as idealist philosophy asserts, every relation to a putatively mind-independent other is both conditioned and progressively transformed by the way in which we think of ourselves, then this reflexive mediation of our mental life rules out any genuine receptivity toward artifacts of human culture. Hegel himself acknowledges this unsettling implication in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* when he recasts the Socratic doctrine of anamnesis in idealistic terms. Since, as Socrates famously argues in the *Meno*, we can discover only that which is already in our mind, there can be strictly speaking no such thing as learning, and experience is nothing more than the occasion providing the initial “impulse” (*Anstoss*) for the recollection of what we have always already known. In rehearsing this thought Hegel tellingly uses the term *Anstoss*, which plays a central role in Fichte’s articulation of idealism, to designate the mere meaningless prompt to which the encounter with otherness is thus being reduced.⁴⁶ Despite Hegel’s complaint that Fichte’s theory of the subject failed to go beyond the empty tautology of “I=I” and hence represented a deficient form of reason that could not put up with otherness, Hegel’s own recourse to a key Fichtean term in the context of his discussion of Platonic anamnesis accentuates a lingering affinity with the thinking of his much-maligned predecessor.⁴⁷

This affinity, to be sure, does not warrant conflation of Hegel’s position with Fichte’s. Indeed Gadamer takes great pains to avoid such a conflation. As he reminds us, Hegel’s claim that the mind must first become alienated from objectivity in order to recognize itself in the latter gives the lie to the criticism that Hegelian idealism is a philosophy of empty “self-mirroring” that leaves no room for alterity.⁴⁸ However, in his subsequent analysis of Hegel’s concept of experience Gadamer ends up formulating a more elaborate version of that very criticism:

For Hegel, it is necessary, of course, that conscious experience should lead to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself. For him the consummation of experience is “science,” the certainty of itself in knowledge. Hence his criterion of experience is self-knowledge. That is why the dialectic of experience must end in that overcoming of all experience which is attained in absolute knowledge—i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and object. We can now understand why Hegel’s application of dialectic to history, insofar as the latter is supposed to be comprehended in the absolute self-consciousness of philosophy, does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness. From the outset, Hegel conceives of the nature of experience from the point of view of that in which it is surpassed. Experience itself can never be science. Experience stands in an ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge. The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experi-

ence. . . . The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in knowledge that gives closure but in the sort of openness to experience that is freed up through the play of experience itself [*in jener Offenheit für Erfahrung, die durch die Erfahrung selbst freigespielt wird*].⁴⁹

In the final analysis, then, Gadamer agrees with the criticism that the Hegelian insistence on all-encompassing reflexive mediation threatens to mutate into a triumphalist assertion of the power of thought.

Against the excessive claims of Hegelian idealism, Gadamer undertakes to rethink consciousness as “effective-historical consciousness” (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*). This difficult-to-translate term is meant to capture the fact that our sense-making practices are always shaped by what Gadamer calls “hermeneutic experience,” that is to say, by the ongoing encounter with a cultural tradition whose artifacts demand to be recognized in their alterity and whose authority and claim upon us are never just matters to be decided through our critical reflection.⁵⁰ The motto borrowed from Rilke already hints at the basic idea that guides this rethinking, namely, the category of “thrown-ness” that Gadamer’s teacher Heidegger made central to his analysis of “being-there” (*Dasein*). Heidegger’s thought was that every projection of meaning is guided by the historical situation in the midst of which we find ourselves and which always already determines our basic orientation.⁵¹ On this ultimate level, an ineradicable moment of receptivity underlies even our most resolute efforts to make sense.

Crucially, Gadamer develops this thought by reference to Hegel:

The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished. This is also true of the hermeneutic situation—i.e., the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand. The illumination of this situation—reflection on effective history—can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are. *To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete* [*Geschichtlichsein heisst, nie im Sichwissen Aufgehen*]. All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call “substance,” because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity. This almost defines the aim of philosophical hermeneutics: its task is to retrace the path of the Hegelian *Phenomenology of Spirit* until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it.⁵²

The program of reversing Hegel's *Phenomenology* should not mislead us into thinking that Gadamer flatly rejects the Hegelian argument against Kant's philosophy of finitude. What he calls for is certainly not a return to a naïvely trustful acceptance of the given. Gadamer readily concedes the formal unassailability of Hegel's insight that any reflective claim about the limitations of knowledge and its dependence on a "beyond" is self-refuting.⁵³ However, he concurs with Heidegger in refusing to equate substantive truth with formal correctness:

However clearly one demonstrates the inner contradictions of all relativist views, it is as Heidegger has said: all these victorious arguments have something of the attempt to bowl one over. However cogent they may seem, they still miss the main point. In making use of them one is proved right, and yet they do not express any superior insight of value. That the thesis of skepticism or relativism refutes itself to the extent that it claims to be true is an irrefutable argument. But what does it achieve? The reflective argument that proves successful here rebounds against the arguer, for it renders the truth value of reflection suspect. It is not the reality of skepticism or of truth-dissolving relativism but the truth claim of all formal argument that is affected.⁵⁴

Gadamer suggests, accordingly, that the Hegelian type of dialectical argumentation cannot lessen, let alone invalidate, the experiences of contingency, uncertainty, and vulnerability that motivate our claims about the inescapably finite character of our worldly comportments. And insofar as such arguments prove powerless in the face of the basic experience of finitude, their efficacy can only lead one to wonder whether discursive reasoning has any purchase at all in this domain. Strikingly, Gadamer goes on to liken Hegel's dialectical argument to sophistry and invokes the Platonic insight "that there is no argumentatively adequate criterion by which to distinguish between truly philosophical and sophistical discourse" and hence "the formal refutability of a proposition does not necessarily exclude its being true."⁵⁵

With the Platonic distinction between formal correctness and truth we have arrived at the crux of Gadamer's objection to Hegel; for the disagreement between the two thinkers is ultimately a metaphilosophical one that concerns the relationship between truth and conceptual language. It is an axiomatic principle of Hegel's thinking that nothing outside the reach of discursive language can count as authoritative for modern subjects. Consequently, Hegel restricts truth to what can be discursively articulated.⁵⁶ Against such extraordinary confidence in the power of conceptual discourse, Gadamer draws attention to an experience of truth registering in the philosophy of finitude that remains undiminished by the performative contradiction involved in attempts at assert-

ing that truth. Similarly to Adorno, whose Marxian-inspired revision of Hegel emerged roughly contemporaneously with Gadamer's traditionalist reversal, Gadamer holds that philosophy must find a way to acknowledge certain truths about our standpoint that cannot be straightforwardly stated and whose paradigmatic manifestation is art.⁵⁷

Since the disagreement between these two views is a metatheoretical one, it cannot be resolved on grounds of argumentative consistency alone. Nor is it necessary to settle this matter here, however. My goal has been to stake out the intellectual field whose extreme poles are reached in the thinking of Hegel and Gadamer, and to show that this field owes its shape to the Kantian legacy. Kant's intricate account of the conjunction of receptivity and spontaneity in knowledge has had far-reaching consequences for modern conceptions of mental life, and not only in the area of epistemology. Tensions internal to the Kantian account led the post-Kantian idealists to characterize the spontaneity of knowledge in more radical terms than Kant ever envisioned. Not only did such emphatic assertions of the power of thought threaten to undercut the notion of a mind-independent constraint to which knowledge remains answerable; by relativizing the otherness of other minds, they made it difficult to see how our mental life can be receptive to the products and utterances of others.

Gadamer's work remains a compelling reminder of this threat posed by idealism. Yet even though Gadamer's polemic against idealism is tempered by a great deal of hermeneutic generosity, his agenda imposes certain limitations on his openness toward his idealist interlocutors. In particular, Gadamer does not take the full measure of the manifold ways in which the problematic of cultural transmission arises in the works of German idealist authors. This is the lacuna I propose to remedy in my study. In the following chapters, I offer a sustained examination of the German idealists' struggles to account for the indispensable role that receptivity towards human-made models must play in our mental life.

1

KANT ON THE FORMATION OF TASTE

THE QUARREL CONTINUED

It is often assumed that Kant's tendency to equate enlightened rationality with independent thought prevented him from doing justice to the inherently historical character of human mindedness. In one of the first responses to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, already Johann Georg Hamann took Kant to task for his alleged failure on this score, complaining in his 1784 *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason* that Kant sought to suppress reason's ineluctable dependence upon cultural transmission.¹ Recent decades have seen a growing interest in Kant's philosophy of history.² Still, much of the scholarly literature dealing with the three *Critiques*, the systematic core of the Kantian corpus, is liable to give the impression that Kant operates with an ahistorical picture of the mind.

Hamann, for one, may be forgiven for leaping to that conclusion. His meta-critique was written six years before Kant concluded his critical trilogy with the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which among all of Kant's works is the most explicit in addressing questions concerning the models, the transmission, and the progress of culture. Close attention paid to the relevant arguments of that work ought to dispel the myth of Kant's disregard for cultural transmission. Of the three principal forms of normativity distinguished by Kant (cognitive, moral, and aesthetic), taste in particular is shown by Kant to require the orienting authority of historically transmitted models. In this chapter I develop an inter-

pretive counterpoint to the familiar thesis—which does, admittedly, capture one side of a complex state of affairs—that Kant anchors taste in human nature. My account of the historical dimension of Kant's aesthetics will enable me to refute another commonplace that has become a mainstay of Kantian exegesis, namely, the thesis that, compared to natural beauty, the beauty of art plays a subordinate role in Kant's aesthetics. By bringing out the systematic centrality of art and art criticism to Kant's account, the argument of this chapter will show that Kant's thinking about the relation between the natural and the artificial fundamentally informs his vision of the interplay between receptivity and spontaneity in the aesthetic domain. It will also become apparent that attention to this frequently neglected aspect of the third *Critique* can throw new light on the reception of Kant's work by such post-Kantians as Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling and Hegel.

More often than not, the prevailing view of Kant as a basically ahistorical thinker is advanced in interpretations that are themselves less than fully sensitive to the historical context of his works. In trying to remedy the situation just outlined one does well, therefore, to recall the relevant debates of the period. In particular, it is instructive to consider Kant's arguments against the backdrop of the ongoing, European-wide negotiation between the conflicting claims of innovation and tradition that began with the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns (1687–1715). This is not the context in which Kant's aesthetics is typically situated. Historically informed scholarship on Kant's aesthetics is far more likely to discuss the third *Critique* against the backdrop of Baumgarten's Wolffian rationalism and the Scottish Enlightenment. Yet crucial aspects of Kant's account are thrown into sharp relief when one approaches his aesthetics with a view to the lineage of historical reflection that begins with the Quarrel.

On a purely programmatic level, the stakes of the Quarrel are relatively easy to establish. Against the classicist veneration of ancient authors the Moderns contended that, to quote Fontenelle's famous verdict, "nothing halts progress, nothing constrains the mind so much as excessive admiration for the ancients."³ In the course of the debate, however, both the position of the Moderns and that of the Ancients underwent a series of complicated transformations whose inner logic has been incisively analyzed by Hans Robert Jauss.⁴ In the opening stages of the Quarrel, the Moderns mainly relied on the argument that contemporary writers were more advanced in the arts than those of antiquity simply because they could rely on a more extensive body of experience and a more elaborate system of rules. Following a long lineage of authors reaching back to Augustine, the Moderns compared the history of humankind to the life of an individual and asserted on that ground that (to quote Charles Perrault's formulation) "it is us

who are the ancients.”⁵ As Jauss points out, this vindication of modernity, diametrically opposed to the contemporary association of modernity with innovation, still presupposed the same, fundamentally ahistorical, humanistic ideal of perfection that oriented the Ancients in the early stages of the debate.⁶ Indeed, relying on the work of historian Hans Baron, Jauss shows that key elements of the position of the Moderns were already anticipated by humanists of the Italian and Spanish Renaissance. They too described their contemporaries as the real ancients and nevertheless urged them to trust nature’s enduring capacity for creative renewal and to emulate, rather than imitate, the ancients.⁷

If the Quarrel eventually gave rise to a novel way of thinking about history, this outcome was mainly due to the polemical challenge posed by the arguments of the Ancients. Jauss outlines the stages of the resultant dialectical engagement by reference to subsequent volumes of Perrault’s *A Parallel between the Ancients and the Moderns Concerning the Arts and Sciences*, published between 1688 and 1697. In the later installments, the dialogue with the Ancients rehearsed by Perrault compelled him to admit that the fine arts were not, after all, perfectible in the same way as the sciences. Indeed works of art that reflected advances in taste and technique could nevertheless fail to attain to the unsurpassable beauty of earlier, more rudimentary works inspired by a unique and inimitable nature-given genius.⁸ Perrault thus had to concede the existence of a “relative beautiful” (*beau relatif*) peculiar to a unique historical moment, which could not be taken up into a narrative of steady progress. This concession from the Modern side encouraged the Ancients in their turn to press the point that each epoch had its own historically specific canon of taste and hence ancient and modern art could not be measured by the same yardstick.⁹ Accordingly, in the early eighteenth-century debate about Homer that grew out of the Quarrel, various quibbles raised by the Moderns about the alleged crudeness of the Homeric poems were countered with the argument that ancient art had to be appreciated against the background of the fundamentally different world out of which it arose. By the end of the Quarrel, then, the Ancients too had abandoned the idea that works of ancient art could in any straightforward sense serve as normative models for the modern age. The irreducibly distinct character of each historical period had become an indisputable truth.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Germany experienced a belated revival of the Quarrel, which gave the discussion a new twist.¹⁰ Central to this development was Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s 1755 essay *Thoughts On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*. The essay has come to be known as a founding document of German Classicism as well as of a near-

obsessive preoccupation with Greek antiquity that would galvanize much of German culture well into the twentieth century. Winckelmann's celebration of the singular perfection of ancient Greek art culminated in the well-known paradox: "The only way for us to become great, and indeed—if this is possible—inimitable, is by imitating the ancients."¹¹ Crucially, what Winckelmann meant by the imitation of the ancients cannot be understood without reference to his understanding of the properly artistic imitation of nature, which he opposed to mere copying. On this point, Winckelmann's thinking was along Neoplatonist rather than Platonist lines. The task of the artist, as he saw it, was not to contrive painstakingly accurate representations of natural objects but to render visible the archetype of which visible nature itself was merely a flawed reflection.¹² For Winckelmann, the imitation of nature and that of Greek antiquity were but interdependent ways of fostering the power of idealization required for great art. Modern artists, who no longer had access to the bodily beauty and freshness of perception native to ancient Greece, had to undergo a school of vision by studying the art of that bygone culture. What Winckelmann deemed worthy of imitation in ancient art was thus not the works themselves but the ideal of beauty that they conveyed in a visible form, with which successor artists were supposed to imbue their imitations of an inherently deficient nature.¹³ It was only if the artist's perception of natural objects was refracted through an optic informed by ancient art that his portrayal of nature could "by a kind of chemical transformation" transcend the lowly status of the copy. Conversely, however, if contemplation of ancient art was to enhance, rather than stifle, creativity, it had to be enlivened by fresh impressions of the nature outside and stirrings of the nature within. Hence the pedantic copying of ancient precursors could no more engender great art than could that of nature.¹⁴ Artistic creation, as Winckelmann envisioned it in his early treatise on imitation, was supposed to free itself from subservience to the empirical models provided by nature and history through the reciprocal mediation of these two domains. The famous call for imitation of the ancients thus stands in the service of what Michael Fried aptly describes as a project of cultural reorigination.¹⁵

Four years after the publication of Winckelmann's treatise, Edward Young, an English poet and cleric, approached the problem of imitating the ancients from the opposite angle in a polemic squarely directed against the neoclassicism of Alexander Pope. In his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), which was translated into German a year after its publication and exerted a profound influence upon the *Sturm und Drang* generation, Young declared that great precursors "engross our attention, and so prevent a due inspection of ourselves; they *prejudice* our Judgment

in favour of their abilities, and so lessen the sense of our own; and they *intimidate* us with the splendor of their Renown, and thus under Diffidence bury our strength.”¹⁶ Young did not conclude, however, that the modern writer must simply ignore ancient precursors. His prescription deserves to be cited at length:

§72 Must we then, you say, not imitate antient Authors? §73 Imitate them, by all means; but imitate aright. §74 He that imitates the divine *Iliad*, does not imitate *Homer*; but he who takes the same method, which *Homer* took, for arriving at a capacity of accomplishing a work so great. §75 Tread in his steps to the sole Fountain of Immortality; drink where he drank, at the true *Helicon*, that is, at the breast of Nature: Imitate; but imitate not the *Composition*, but the *Man*. §76 For may not this Paradox pass into a Maxim? [*viz.*] “The less we copy the renowned Antients, we shall resemble them the more.”¹⁷

With this programmatic appeal, Young appears to invert the Winckelmannian imperative. Whereas Winckelmann demanded that artists imitate the Greeks to become inimitable, Young asserts that we can become equal to the Greeks by resisting the temptation to copy their works. The semblance of contradiction disappears, however, when we consider the ensuing passage:

But possibly you may reply, that you must either imitate Homer, or depart from Nature. §78 Not so: For suppose You was to change place, in time, with Homer; then, if you write naturally, you might as well charge Homer with an imitation of You. §79 Can you be said to imitate Homer for writing so, as you would have written, if Homer had never been? §80 As far as a regard to Nature, and sound Sense, will permit a Departure from your great Predecessors; so far, ambitiously, depart from them; the farther from them in Similitude, the nearer are you to them in Excellence; you rise by it into an Original; become a noble Collateral, not an humble Descendant from them. §81 Let us build our Compositions with the Spirit, and in the Taste, of the Antients; but not with their Materials.¹⁸

We can thus see the paradoxical aspiration for equality through avoidance of imitation as the dialectical flipside of Winckelmann’s imperative to achieve inimitable greatness through imitation. The path recommended by Young (“imitate not the Composition, but the Man,” “write naturally”) converges with what Winckelmann envisions as the fruitful imitation of the Greeks: not, that is, extraneous copying but appropriation of an innate capacity for idealization exemplified by ancient artists, a capacity that we moderns must cultivate through appreciation of ancient art. Without explicitly acknowledging this through their terminology, both authors play variations on a distinction between *imitatio* and *aemulatio* that can be traced back via renaissance humanism to Roman antiquity.

The affinities, as well as the differences, between Winckelmann's and Young's seemingly contrary arguments have been extensively analyzed by Hungarian philosopher Sándor Radnóti, whose major study firmly establishes Winckelmann's centrality to the emergent modern idea of autonomous art.¹⁹ As Radnóti notes, it is in the final analysis Winckelmann's growing concern with aesthetic response that most strongly distinguishes his brand of classicism from Young's proto-romantic vision. Especially after Winckelmann moved to Rome and discovered his vocation as an art historian, he showed less and less interest in fostering a contemporary art that would emulate the ancients. Since he could not trust the dynamism of history to bring about a restoration of ancient grandeur, Winckelmann dedicated his energies to the project of founding a cult of great art whose temple was to be the museum. The paradigmatic activity through which originality had to be realized was thus no longer artistic creation but aesthetic appreciation. Ancient works possessed of a genuine aesthetic spirit had to be brought back to life through the originality of a dedicated viewer, indeed a viewer of genius. Disregarding the sterile canons of tradition and scholarship, such a viewer could rely on the sole testimony of his own eyes and thus let the purely aesthetic qualities of the work of art mobilize the innermost powers of his subjectivity. For this operation to succeed, it was imperative to sever the continuity of tradition, which by its very nature tends to harden into staid convention. In this respect, the transplantation of ancient art into the still uncultivated "colony" of Northern modernity could actually bring about an aesthetically fruitful de-contextualization. It enabled modern viewers to bracket the original function of ancient works and to reimagine them as exemplars of autonomous art that participate in the immanent evolution of style.²⁰

Winckelmann's interest in the historical development of style stands in marked contrast to Young's claim that genial production inspired by the creativity of nature could render the chronological order between Homer and his modern-day successors irrelevant ("you might as well charge Homer with an imitation of You"). For Young, the emulation of ancient precursors is a mere matter of maintaining openness toward the ever-creative source of nature that nourishes all great art and not contenting ourselves with anything less vivid than the Homeric poems. For Winckelmann, by contrast, ancient art can teach us how to transfigure nature precisely because it embodies certain historically specific features of antiquity that are absent from modern culture.

These differences between the two authors are mainly to be explained by the divergent standpoints of artistic creation and aesthetic appreciation, and to a lesser extent by their different polemical targets. Yet these differences should

not obscure the convergence between the two lines of thought. Winckelmann's emphasis on the spirit of aesthetic originality inherent in ancient works and his call for original aesthetic response place his thinking in surprising proximity to Young's. Although with importantly different accents, each of the two authors exploits the old humanistic concept of *aemulatio*, understood in contradistinction to *imitatio*, and endows his version of that term with novel connotations of creativity. Indeed Radnóti's account of the relation between the two authors suggests that their impact upon late eighteenth-century European culture was due less to their revival of a century-old dispute about originality and imitation than to the way in which their formulations revealed a hitherto hidden complementarity between the two poles of that debate and thereby inaugurated a discourse cognizant of this interdependence.²¹

It is worth pausing here for a moment to take stock of the issues animating this emergent discourse before zeroing in on Kant's contribution to it. The central problem is clearly that of free succession. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe proposed that the Winckelmannian injunction of imitation for the sake of inimitable originality signals the threat of "a gigantic double bind, and the consequent threat of psychosis," a threat that would become catastrophic reality for Hölderlin.²² According to Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of Schiller and Hölderlin, the effort to come to grips with this problem requires the nature vs. culture dichotomy articulating the difference between antiquity and modernity to be reinscribed within each of those historical terms, such that both antiquity and modernity now appear riven by an internal difference.²³ Indeed, as discussed, the problematic relation between nature and culture already destabilized both sides of the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. In the Quarrel as well as in its eighteenth-century aftermath, this problematic is bound up with the question of whether great art is to be thought of as the product of a historically specific culture or as the manifestation of a putatively timeless, natural genius.

The entire widely ramifying problematic just surveyed is at work in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*—or so I will argue in what follows. Similarly to Winckelmann and Young, Kant is acutely aware of the tension between the modern principle of originality and the authority of tradition, and he too sets out to reconcile the two poles by demonstrating their interdependence. Kant undertakes this, however, within the framework of a transcendently grounded theory that far surpasses in both scope and complexity the more narrowly conceived arguments of Winckelmann and Young. In doing so Kant himself takes his guidance from a precursor, as Sanford Budick demonstrates in meticulous

detail in his recent book *Kant and Milton*.²⁴ Recalling the overwhelming importance of Milton for eighteenth-century German culture, Budick builds a powerful case for the depth of the engagement with Milton's poetry of the sublime that becomes legible between the lines of Kant's reflections on morality, originality, and succession. At the heart of this preoccupation with Milton is a question that Budick formulates as follows: "How can one achieve a mental life that is characterized by independence and spontaneity—and originality [*Originalität*] of the poetic genius, preeminently—and at the same time inherit one's given world, one's past, through the mere imitation, which, says Kant, underlies all learning?"²⁵

Budick answers this question by showing how Kant's reception of Milton both exemplifies and articulates a theory of free succession centered on the power of sublime poetry to make experienceable that which defies representation, namely, moral autonomy. The reach of Budick's argument is necessarily limited, however, by Kant's tendency to downplay the role of historical transmission in philosophy in general and his own thinking in particular. I will have more to say about this topic in chapter 2. For the purposes of this chapter, the important thing to note is that Kant's occluded sense of the historical character of the philosophical enterprise does not prevent him from acknowledging the historicity of other areas of culture. There is, in particular, one cultural domain in which succession plays a constitutive role according to Kant. That domain belongs to aesthetic experience. As I will show in the following section, Kant's reflections on this aspect of mental life involve a particularly intricate interplay between an extratemporal model of taste rooted in human nature (a "nature" conjoining the merely natural with the intelligible) and human-made exemplars occupying a historically specific position within a constantly evolving and culturally transmitted canon.

MOST IN NEED OF EXAMPLES

In order to shed light on this frequently overlooked aspect of Kant's aesthetics, it is best to approach the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* by way of a somewhat nonobvious entry point, namely, §32 in the "Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments." The burden of this section is to identify the first of the two formal features peculiar to judgments of taste, which Kant reviews in the hope of finding a clue to the ground of the binding validity of such judgments. Resorting to the locution "as if" (*als ob*) that plays such a notoriously complex role throughout the third *Critique*, Kant describes the first formal feature as follows: "The judg-

ment of taste determines its object with regard to satisfaction (as beauty) with a claim to the assent of everyone, as if it were objective" (5:281).²⁶ To a reader unfamiliar with the preceding arguments of the third *Critique* this observation might seem to suggest that pure judgments of taste, similarly to cognitive judgments, predicate a determinate property of their object. Kant of course denies this and goes on to anticipate the second formal feature of pure judgments of taste by stressing their subjective character. Such judgments, Kant writes, assert beauty "only in accordance with that quality in [the object] by means of which it corresponds with our ways of receiving it" (5:282). Consequently, in exercising taste everyone has to bring his way of receiving objects into play and judge for himself, rather than simply deferring to others' judgments. Although the disposition of our faculties represents a universally shared ground of taste that does not depend on the vagaries of individual experience, this apriori ground is fundamentally different from the sort of conceptual criterion that underwrites cognitive judgments. For this reason a pure judgment of taste, if it is really one, cannot be dislodged by arguments invoking conceptual criteria.

Significantly, to drive home the latter point Kant invokes the example of a young poet who remains unfazed by the unfavorable response of his public. This move on Kant's part might seem baffling at first, inasmuch as it blurs the difference between autonomous aesthetic response and original artistic creation. This conflation is warranted, however, by Kant's assumption, central to his theory of genius, that artistic creation must involve the same type of free harmonious mental play that Kant has shown to be central to aesthetic response. In fact the conflation is revealing, for it brings out the affinities of Kant's conception with the idea of originality through emulation adumbrated by Winckelmann and Young. The parallels become clear when Kant addresses the apparent contradiction between his emphatic notion of the autonomy of taste and the very idea of a canon:

That the works of the ancients are rightly praised as models, and their authors called classical, like a sort of nobility among writers, who give laws to the people through their precedence, seems to indicate *a posteriori* sources of taste and to contradict the autonomy of taste in every subject. But one could just as well say that the ancient mathematicians, who have been regarded until now as nearly indispensable models of the greatest thoroughness and elegance of the synthetic method, also demonstrate an imitative reason [*keine nachahmende Vernunft*] on our part and its incapacity to produce from its own resources strict proofs, with the greatest intuitive evidence, by means of the construction of concepts. There is no use of our powers at all, however free it might be, and even of reason (which must draw all its judgments from the

common source *a priori*), which, if every subject always had to begin entirely from the raw predisposition of his own nature, would not fall into mistaken attempts if others had not preceded him with their own, not in order to make their successors into mere imitators, but rather by means of their method to put others on the right path for seeking out the principles in themselves and thus for following their own, often better, course. Even in religion, where, certainly, each must derive the rule of his conduct from himself, because he also remains responsible for it himself and cannot shift the guilt for his transgressions onto others, whether as teachers or as predecessors, general precepts, which one may either have acquired from priests or philosophers or drawn from oneself, never accomplish as much as an example of virtue or holiness, which, established in history, does not make the autonomy of virtue out of one's own original idea of morality (*a priori*) dispensable or transform this into a mechanism of imitation. **Succession** [*Nachfolge*], related to a precedent, not imitation [*Nachahmung*], is the correct expression for any influence that the products of an exemplary author can have on others, which means no more than to create from the same sources from which the latter created, and to learn from one's predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing. But among all the faculties and talents, taste is precisely the one which, because its judgment is not determinable by means of concepts and precepts, is most in need of the examples of what in the progress of culture has longest enjoyed approval if it is not quickly to fall back into barbarism and sink back into the crudity of its first attempts. (5:282–283)

This passage is as striking a refutation of the myth of Kant's blindness to history as one might hope to find anywhere. The scope of Kant's thesis here clearly extends beyond aesthetics. For what Kant claims is that *all* of our nature-given faculties stand in need of cultivation through learning from the example of precursors. This claim may indeed be taken to lend support to Stanley Rosen's suggestion that Kant discovered "the modern conception of history as an ontologically independent dimension within which other dimensions are somehow unified," effectively anticipating the nineteenth-century preoccupation with historicity.²⁷

This is hardly the place to weigh all the arguments that might be adduced for and against Rosen's sweeping thesis. However, a tentative assessment of its merits may be hazarded on the basis of a brief comparison of Kant's version of the *aemulatio* vs. *imitatio* dichotomy—for this is indeed what our passage presents—to the versions developed by Winckelmann and Young. In making this comparison, we must take care not to be led astray by terminological "false friends." As it should be clear from my discussion of these two authors, what Winckelmann calls *Nachahmung* and Young describes as "imitating the man" corresponds to Kant's term for *aemulatio*, namely *Nachfolge* (succession). Kant reserves the term *Nachahmung* (imitation) for the negative pole of the dichot-

omy, which may be aligned with what Winckelmann describes as the literal-minded copying of others' works and Young as "imitating the work." Bearing in mind now the difference between Winckelmann's and Young's versions of *aemulatio*, we may say that Kant's general claim that emulation is central to the exercise of *all* human faculties construes the role of models in the formal fashion seen in Young. In Kant's formulation, this "means no more than to create from the same sources from which the latter created, and to learn from one's predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing." By contrast, Kant's more narrowly focused claim that, of all faculties, taste is *most* in need of time-tested examples actually suggests a *different kind* of dependence on models, one premised on the essential difference between the present and the past and which to that extent more closely resembles the dependence posited by Winckelmann.

We may note, furthermore, that this latter assertion represents a striking echo of, as well as a dialectical counterpoint to, a central theme of the Quarrel. We have seen that the Moderns had to exempt the aesthetic domain, and in particular the phenomenon of "relative beauty," from their overarching conception of progress, thereby paving the way to a properly historical view that accepts the incommensurability of each period. A latter-day Modern, Kant too has confidence in progress in the sciences and he too denies the perfectibility of the arts. For Kant, however, the special status of the aesthetic has to do, not with the absence of perfectibility in art, but with the fallibility of taste. And whereas the late 17th-century insight into the lack of progress in the arts resulted in a certain aesthetic relativism that precluded normative commensuration between contemporary and past art, Kant's claim about the fallibility of taste leads him to assert the necessity of just such commensuration. To elucidate the considerations underlying this position is the aim of this section.

In attempting to understand why Kant thinks that, of all faculties, taste is most in need of models, one does well to begin by considering what Kant terms the "exemplarity" of pure judgments of taste. And since that topic figures most prominently in the fourth moment of the "Analytic of the Beautiful," it makes sense to begin the investigation here. At stake in the fourth moment is the modal aspect of pure judgments of taste, that is, the peculiar necessity expressed in them. As elsewhere in the third *Critique*, here too Kant's line of thought is driven by a systematic agenda. In particular, Kant wants to distinguish taste as an autonomous form of normativity from both knowledge and morality. To be sure, this characteristically Kantian act of demarcation is subservient to a broader project of integration. Kant's ultimate aim in securing the

independence of taste from both cognition and morality is to show that taste, precisely as an autonomous principle, can mediate between these two domains. Less abstractly put, the critique of taste holds the promise for Kant of establishing a type of pleasurable feeling that is subjective, irreducibly first-personal, and yet amenable to a universal normativity. After Kant has shown in the first *Critique* that the freedom of the will is metaphysically compatible with the natural-scientific picture of the world, he now wants to show that our affective, animal constitution can conform to universal laws and is thus capable of converting the self-legislation of a free will into actual free agency. This is why taste, a capacity for universal pleasure, assumes systematic significance for Kant (5:197).

In keeping with this systematic orientation, Kant's account of the modality of judgments of taste turns on a two-way contrast: on the one hand, with the "theoretical objective necessity" expressed in cognitive judgments underwritten by determinate conceptual criteria, and on the other, with the "practical necessity" pertaining to moral judgments concerning the conformity or nonconformity of a particular maxim of action with the autonomy of the will (5:236–237). Unlike these two forms of necessity, pure judgments of taste express what Kant crucially calls an "exemplary" necessity, that is, "a necessity of the assent of all to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce" (5:237). What this means remains extremely opaque in the first instance. The considerations behind Kant's talk of exemplarity only begin to emerge as Kant proceeds to flesh out the two-way contrast with knowledge and morality in terms of an observation about the peculiar combination of normative force and tentativeness that characterizes pure judgments of taste. Whereas a theoretical judgment about the psychology of others might make a prediction about their agreement or dissent and a moral judgment about duty would unconditionally demand the assent of others, someone who makes a judgment of taste merely "wishes that everyone should approve of the object in question and similarly declare it to be beautiful" (5:237). Kant goes on to claim that the "should" in question is "pronounced only conditionally even given all the data that are required for the judging." One could actually "count" on other's assent, writes Kant, "if only one were always sure that the case were correctly subsumed under that ground as the rule of approval" (5:237). Kant's evident belief that this is not the case suggests that the principle invoked in pure judgments of taste is elusive in a way in which the ground of cognitive and moral judgments is not.

Kant's analysis of the modality of pure judgments of taste thus issues in an inference about the principle of taste. On pain of undercutting the autonomy of taste, Kant must ensure that the principle in question is not an objective

criterion that could be applied in a cognitive judgment. Rather, it must be a subjective principle, and this can only mean that it “determines what pleases or displeases only through feeling” (5:238). It is, I suggest, precisely this linkage between subjectivity and feeling that provides the key to Kant’s difficult conception of exemplarity. To preserve the autonomy of taste, Kant must ensure that the feeling of pleasure that we register and impute to others in judgments of taste is in no way assimilated to representational states that carry some sort of cognitive content. What is discerned by means of such pure pleasure cannot be an objective state of affairs whose occurrence or nonoccurrence might be established through an introspective use of our cognitive faculties, let alone predicted by recourse to the causal laws that govern the interaction of objects with our bodily senses. Indeed already in the “Analytic of the Beautiful” Kant establishes that the feeling of pleasure and displeasure has no objective content whatsoever, since by means of it “nothing at all in the object is designated, but . . . the subject feels itself as it is affected by the representation” (5:204). The key terminological distinction is fully developed in §3:

If a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is called sensation [*Empfindung*], then this expression means something entirely different than if I call the representation of a thing (though sense, as a receptivity belonging to the faculty of cognition) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is related to the object, but in the first case it is related solely to the subject, and does not serve for any cognition at all, *not even that by which the subject cognizes itself*.

In the above explanation, however, we understand by the word “sensation” [*Empfindung*] an objective representation of the senses; and in order not to always run the risk of being misinterpreted, we will call that which must always remain merely subjective and absolutely cannot constitute a representation of an object by the otherwise customary name of “feeling” [*Gefühl*]. The green color of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, through which no object is represented, i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it). (5:206, emphasis added)

If that to which the subject is receptive in feeling is not a given object but the subject’s own state in representing an object, then it is not far-fetched to describe feeling—in terms borrowed from Thomas Nagel—as an awareness of “what it is like to be” in that mental state, or otherwise put, the phenomenological quality of that state as opposed to its intentional content.²⁸ Kant uses another locution to characterize the peculiar subjectivity of the faculty of feeling: he writes of a “feeling of life” (5:204), which he subsequently specifies by claiming that feel-

ings of pleasure register a promotion of our activity and so incline us to continue that activity, whereas feelings of displeasure register a hindrance of our activity and hence motivate us to escape the state we are in (5:220).

Kant's analysis of the modality of taste thus suggests that the principle of taste must be our capacity for a feeling that is irreducibly subjective in the sense just outlined but nevertheless attributable to every properly functioning subject. This hypothesis of a universal feeling is introduced under the heading of "common sense." Kant must now address the obvious question whether the supposition of such a common sense is actually warranted by any consideration beside the systematic interest taken in the autonomy of taste. In §21 Kant answers this question in the affirmative, arguing that knowledge itself presupposes a noncognitive common sense.

The relevant argument takes its point of departure from the theory of reflecting judgment outlined in the introduction to the third *Critique*. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant already established that experience involves the faculty of judgment in its subsumptive or "determining" use, that is, the application of concepts (general rules of thought) to the particulars encountered in experience (A132–134). Our most general concepts of objects as such, the categories, are applied to sense data through such determining judgment. However, we also need empirical concepts that identify specific kinds of objects. Thus, in the "Introduction" to the third *Critique*, Kant argues that the determining use of judgment must be complemented with what he calls reflecting judgment: the capacity to form new empirical concepts for particulars given in experience that cannot be adequately described by means of the concepts that we already have at our disposal (5:179). Through the reflecting use of judgment, humans develop an increasingly elaborate array of empirical concepts identifying particular classes of objects. Without this capacity, reason could not integrate the teeming diversity of particular natural phenomena into a hierarchical system of concepts and laws.

Whether Kant succeeded in grounding his theory of taste in the epistemological concept of reflection just outlined remains a disputed issue in Kant scholarship, involving a host of interpretive difficulties that cannot be addressed here. It should suffice to highlight the key move by which Kant hopes to show how the cognitive power of reflection may become a means of aesthetic discrimination. According to Kant's model, when we form a new concept we rely not only on the understanding, the faculty that forms concepts, but also on the productive imagination, the faculty that projects the "schema" by means of which sensibly given particulars can actually be recognized as instantiations of the new concept.²⁹

Consequently, the success of reflecting judgment requires the harmonious co-operation of the two faculties. Kant suggests that the disposition (or “proportion”) of the two faculties engaged in this coordinated effort varies depending on the formal features of the represented object.³⁰ What we discern in finding an object beautiful is an alignment between the two faculties that is optimal for their reciprocally stimulating activity. Such reciprocal enlivening of our faculties results in an unusual facilitation of our mental activity that we notice as pleasure. The feeling of this facilitation causes us to want to linger in that state, a self-perpetuating dynamic that Kant takes to be definitive of pleasure (5:220). Whenever the sensible form of a given object invites a reflective activity characterized by an optimal attunement of the faculties, the pleasure induced by this facilitation of our effort arrests the goal-oriented activity of concept formation in a state of harmonious suspense, one in which the mind plays with multiple possibilities of schematizing and conceptualizing the object. In such cases conceptual closure is indefinitely deferred for the sake of pleasurable contemplation.

The underlying optimal proportion between the imagination and the understanding is, then, the sought-for principle of the aesthetic common sense postulated in §20. This principle fulfills the *prima facie* paradoxical-sounding double requirement of subjective universality. First, it is a universal principle insofar as all humans are equipped with the cognitive faculties whose optimally proportioned interplay produces the pleasure registering in judgments of beauty. Second, and crucially for my argument, the optimal proportion fulfills the second requirement, being subjective in a sense that may be inferred from the underlying theory of reflecting judgment. Since the proportion in question is a characteristic of the very activity of concept formation, the conditions under which such a happy proportion occurs cannot themselves be specified in terms of determinate concepts that might then serve as objective criteria of beauty.³¹ Rather, the optimal proportion is a feature of our cognitive activity that Kant calls “sensitive” (*empfindbar*, 20:223), meaning that it is discernible only via the purely subjective “feeling of life” that registers the facilitation of our mental activity as pleasure and its hindrance as displeasure. Kant’s theory of feeling, combined with the theory of reflecting judgment, is thus supposed to provide a transcendental grounding for Kant’s initial observation that “one cannot determine *a priori* which objects will or will not suit taste, one must try it out” (5:191); or, Kant puts it in the second moment of the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” “one wants to submit the object to his own eyes” (5:216).

We are now in a better position to elucidate the sense in which judgments of taste may be said to express an exemplary necessity. Since the principle of taste

cannot be converted into an explicit rule, to ascertain an object's conformity to it one must rely on the subjective testimony of feeling. For that very reason, a judgment that discerns such conformity "is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce" (5:237). It is important to be clear, however, about the sense in which it is impossible to produce the rule in question. In particular, one might be tempted to take Kant to make the relatively banal point that a pure judgment of taste instantiates a rule that is somehow ineffable, albeit fully determinate and unequivocally applicable. It should be clear from §22, however, that Kant is making a much stronger claim:

Thus the common sense, of whose judgment I here offer my judgment as an example and on account of which I ascribe exemplary validity to it, is a merely ideal norm, under the presupposition of which one could rightfully make a judgment that agrees with it and the satisfaction in an object that is expressed in it into a rule for everyone: since the principle, though only subjective, is nevertheless assumed to be universal (an idea necessary for everyone), which, as far as the unanimity of different judges is concerned, could demand universal assent just like an objective one—if *only one were certain of having correctly subsumed under it*. (5:239, emphasis added)

If in making a judgment of beauty I cannot predict that others will actually share my pleasure in the object at hand, then this is not just because others may fail to judge with taste. Rather, it is also and more disconcertingly the case that even my own putatively pure judgment of taste may, unbeknownst to me, fail to be one. Already in §8, Kant raised the possibility that a "judgment of the agreeable," registering the way in which the material features of an object affect one's idiosyncratic constitution, may be mistaken for a judgment of beauty, ostensibly based on a disinterested, universalizable type of pleasure taken in formal features of the object. Consequently, "whether someone who believes himself to be making a judgment of taste is in fact judging in accordance with this idea can be uncertain" (5:216). Kant returns to the problem of error in a footnote appended to the "Deduction" in §38, where the claim to universal imputability is said to depend on the assumption that one's judgment is based solely on the "formal conditions of the power of judgment," without the interference of conceptual criteria or agreeable sensations: "If an error is made with regard to the latter, this concerns only the incorrect application to a particular case of the authority that a law gives us, by which the authority in general is not suspended" (5:290n). The reason for Kant's recurrent concern with the possibility of erroneous judgments of taste does not become clear, however, until the important "Remark" that follows §38. Here Kant notes that the correct subsumption of a given object

under the principle of taste “has unavoidable difficulties that do not pertain to the logical power of judgment (because in the latter one subsumes under concepts, but in the aesthetic power of judgment one subsumes under a relation that is merely a matter of sensation [*Empfindung*], that of the imagination and the understanding reciprocally attuned to each other in the represented form of the object, where the subsumption can easily be deceptive)” (5:290–291).

Now it is not immediately clear how the reference to “sensation,” by which Kant clearly means feeling, is supposed to explain the claim that judgment is more likely to be deceptive in the context of taste than in those of cognition or morality. The answer has to do, in short, with Kant’s strong demarcation of the faculty of feeling from cognition. By noting that feeling does not serve for any cognition, “not even that by which the subject cognizes itself” (5:206), Kant clearly distinguishes the peculiar subjectivity of pleasure from the self-reflexivity of introspective knowledge. The importance of this distinction becomes clear when we recall that pleasure can have multiple sources: beside the formal properties of objects discerned through taste, we can also take pleasure in their agreeable material qualities or their conformity with the moral law (5:210). If, however, the feeling of pleasure that attends our contemplation of an object is devoid of epistemically relevant information about our mental state, then that pleasure alone cannot serve as the basis for any claim regarding its source. Rather, the warrant for such a claim must stem from the broader psychological context within which the pleasure in question arises, which presumably includes other, co-occurrent mental states—and, equally importantly, excludes others.³² Specifically, what warrants the judgment of universal communicability is one’s conscious effort to bracket idiosyncratic interests, inclinations and speak with a “universal voice.” Kant accordingly writes of “the mere consciousness of separation of everything that belongs to the agreeable and the good from the satisfaction that remains to him” (5:216).

This view of the warrant for the judgment of universal communicability has the advantage of shedding light on certain features of Kant’s account that are otherwise difficult to explain or downright baffling. First, it suggests a gloss on what Stanley Corngold describes as the “fore-structure of the aesthetic judgment”: a structure implied by the notoriously difficult claim in §9 that the judgment of universal communicability precedes, rather than follows, the pleasure induced by the harmonious free play of the faculties reflecting on the beautiful object.³³ One may speak of precedence here in the sense that the striving for disinterested feeling provides the anterior validating context for the pleasure of harmonious free play. This pleasure must be distinguished from the subsequent

higher-order pleasure taken in the recognition of its universality.³⁴ Although the latter pleasure is secondary in the straightforward sense that it arises from a judgment about the first-order pleasure of free play, that judgment nevertheless presupposes a striving for aesthetic universality anterior to the free play itself.

Second, we may now see that Kant's choice to open the "Analytic of the Beautiful" with the negatively defined quality of disinterestedness has a substantive basis in the phenomenology of aesthetic response. When Kant justifies this procedure by suggesting that the judgment of taste "takes notice of this [disinterestedness] first" (5:203n), what he means presumably is that judging with taste presupposes that the judger adopt a disinterested stance toward the object. It is not that the object strikes us in such a way as to invite the adoption of a universal vantage point. Rather, the adoption of such a vantage point is a precondition for the sort of experience in which the aesthetic qualities of the object can come into view in the first place. That vantage point is not as it were a natural given but an achievement called for by the idea of an aesthetic common sense. What warrants the pure judgment of taste, then, is the judger's effort to purge his response of interested, empirical factors. Having ascertained that "he cannot discover as grounds any private conditions, pertaining to his subject alone," the judging subject "must therefore regard it as grounded in those that he can also presuppose in everyone else" (5:211).

The key point, however, is that this sort of inference is never immune to error, simply because we can never be entirely sure of having fully succeeded in bracketing private interests.³⁵ Indeed Kant's repeated claim that judgments of taste are particularly prone to error should dispel any lingering suspicion that his universalistic aesthetics entails intolerance in matters of taste.³⁶ Central to Kant's aesthetics no less than to his theory of morality is the thesis that our observational knowledge of our own mental life is no less prone to error than our knowledge of external objects. In both contexts the elusiveness of our standing as judges is the price exacted by Kant's resolve to secure the autonomy of morality and aesthetics, respectively, vis-à-vis theoretical knowledge; and in both contexts proper acknowledgment of the resultant uncertainty ought to preclude complacency and righteousness. However rigorously I monitor my mental state in making a pure judgment of taste, I can never be certain of having succeeded in excluding private conditions from the grounds of my judgment. And this means that I can never be sure that I have succeeded in making a pure judgment of taste that is unadulterated by empirical interest. This, then, is the sense in which the pure judgment of taste expresses merely a conditional demand for agreement: *assuming* that I am right in thinking that

my pleasure in this object is pure, others too must be able to find pleasure in the same object.

One might object here that Kant's doctrine of the fallibility of phenomenal self-knowledge cannot explain why our judgments of taste should be prone to error in some special sense, above and beyond the type of uncertainty with which moral and cognitive judgments are equally fraught. After all, as already noted, the doctrine in question is also invoked to account for the impossibility of assigning praise and blame on moral grounds; and although the matter is more complicated when it comes to cognitive judgments, one might argue that the same circumstance makes it impossible to ascertain through mere introspective observation that a claim about the world is a properly cognitive "judgment of experience" made in conformity with the categories and not just a "judgment of perception" registering a contingent association of sense data. The crucial difference, however, is that in the moral as well as in the cognitive context the reflective activity through which we monitor our judging can take its guidance from an expressly specifiable principle: moral judgments are guided by the categorical imperative, which admits of four verbal formulations, and cognitive judging is guided by the categories corresponding to the logical forms of judgment. By contrast, the optimal proportion between the understanding and the imagination that serves as the touchstone of taste cannot be rendered into a determinate conceptual rule. Since the principle of taste cannot be brought to conceptually explicit consciousness, the conformity of our judging with it can only be inferred *ex negativo* and in a conditional manner, from the hoped-for success of our effort to exclude empirical interests.

THE IDEAL OF BEAUTY

Given what has been said about the indeterminacy and the ideal character of taste, it is not surprising that Kant's first mention of exemplarity should occur following his reiteration of the claim that there can be no objective criterion of taste. I now want to turn to this initial discussion of aesthetic exemplarity. This actually requires me to move backward in the text of the "Analytic of the Beautiful," for the notion of exemplarity is introduced at the end of the third moment (§17), pointing ahead to the elucidation of exemplary necessity offered in the fourth moment.

Before delving into the intricacies of Kant's relevant statement, a brief review of the argumentative context of the third moment is in order. The third moment deals with the relational aspect of pure judgments of taste, that is, the object's

purposiveness vis-à-vis the subject's faculties. With a clear polemical turn against rational aesthetics, in §15 Kant demarcates such subjective purposiveness from the objective purposiveness predicated in judgments of perfection. On the basis of this distinction, Kant proceeds in the next section to distinguish "free" or "self-subsisting" beauties appreciated through pure judgment of taste, with no regard to determinate concepts, from "adherent" or "dependent" (*anhängende*) beauties whose aesthetic appreciation is conditioned by the concept of a particular end that determines what the thing is supposed to be, making the judgment of taste impure. These distinctions enable Kant to approach the difficulty outlined in my discussion of the fourth moment from a different angle. Since pure judgments of taste—that is, judgments concerning free beauty—cannot be based on a conceptually determinate criterion of taste, they must be guided by examples. Kant writes:

The universal communicability of the sensation (of satisfaction or dissatisfaction), and indeed one that occurs without concepts, the unanimity, so far as possible, of all times and peoples about this feeling in the representation of certain objects: although weak and hardly sufficient for conjecture, this is the empirical criterion of the derivation of a taste, confirmed by examples, from the common ground, deeply buried in all human beings, of unanimity in the judging of forms under which objects are given to them.

Hence some products of taste are regarded as exemplary—not as if taste could be acquired by imitating others. For taste must be a faculty of one's own; however, whoever imitates a model certainly shows, so far as he gets it right, a skill, but he shows taste only insofar as he can judge this model himself. (5:232)

Kant's reference to "a taste, confirmed by examples" (5:232) is noteworthy for the use of the indeterminate article. Indeed this marks the emergence of a new topic in Kant's argument. Whereas up until this point Kant was concerned with the formal characteristics of pure judgments of taste, here for the first time he asks how taste is acquired and cultivated within an empirically given and historically specific community. Given that the ground of taste is "deeply buried in all human beings" and cannot be articulated in the form of a conceptually determinate objective criterion, Kant now asks how we can ascertain that the aesthetic sensibility of a particular community is a genuine instantiation of taste and not just a set of arbitrary conventions and socially sanctioned reflexes. His answer is that all we can rely on in assessing the validity of a particular canon of taste is a "weak" "empirical criterion," namely, a set of exemplary objects whose beauty is presumed to be so obvious even to outsiders as to testify to the authoritative status of the canon in question. Yet Kant immediately goes on to qualify this solution by noting that the existence of such examples does not

mean that taste can be acquired through mere imitation of others' endorsement of such exemplary objects. Rather, discernment of that aspect of an object by virtue of which it counts as exemplary for taste already requires a judgment of taste. It follows from this that models of taste cannot instill taste in someone who altogether lacks it.

By making this qualification, Kant acknowledges that his proposed empirical criterion is fraught with a circularity that threatens to prevent it from explaining the possibility of developing or cultivating taste. Indeed it is not clear how exemplary objects might aid the cultivation of taste if, in order to recognize them as exemplary in the first place, one must already be able to judge them with taste in a nonimitative manner. In more concrete terms, the question is how a child or an emergent culture might arrive at the very first judgment of taste, whose object could then serve as an example orientating subsequent acts of judgment. To solve this puzzle Kant introduces a new concept, namely, that of the ideal of beauty: "From this, however, it follows that the highest model, the archetype of taste, is a mere idea, which everyone must produce in himself, and in accordance with which he must judge everything that is an object of taste, or that is an example of judging through taste, even the taste of everyone" (5:232). The curious phrase "even the taste of everyone" (*und selbst den Geschmack von jedermann*) suggests that the judgments for which the ideal of taste furnishes a criterion are not merely about particular objects presented to the senses. Rather, the ideal of beauty also and more importantly has the function of serving as the paradigm by recourse to which one can evaluate a proposed canon of taste implicit in the claim to exemplarity made on behalf of a particular, putatively beautiful, object. In other words, the ideal of beauty is not a model of taste but a meta-level model used to evaluate particular models along with the canons of taste they exemplify, offering a way out of the circle just described.³⁷

This is a tall order, and it is not immediately clear what sort of representation could possibly fit the bill. The opacity of Kant's proposed solution no doubt partly accounts for the puzzlement—and in many cases indeed embarrassed silence—surrounding the doctrine of the ideal of beauty.³⁸ Still, a reconstruction of that doctrine must be hazarded here, for it is crucial to understanding Kant's thinking about aesthetic exemplarity and art. It is in my view possible to unpack a coherent set of considerations at play in Kant's claims about the ideal of beauty—so long as we do not lose sight of the theoretical burden that they are supposed to bear. We must, that is, remember that the ideal of beauty has the function of serving as an archetype by reference to which historically specific canons of taste can be evaluated.

This fact helps explain an important presupposition of Kant's reasoning. Kant appears simply to take for granted that the ideal of taste cannot be a beautiful physical object. This assumption seems reasonable enough. Since no physical object is available at all times to everyone's senses, it follows that no physical object can serve as a universally accessible paradigm. The ideal of beauty must hence be an imaginative representation, a "mere idea, which everyone must produce in himself" (5:232). As Kant sets out to specify the imaginative representation in question, he invokes the distinction between "free" (or "vague") and "adherent" beauty:

The beauty for which an idea is to be sought must not be a vague beauty, but must be a beauty fixed by a concept of objective purposiveness, consequently it must not belong to the object of an entirely pure judgment of taste, but rather to one of a partly intellectualized judgment of taste. I.e., in whatever kind of grounds for judging an ideal is supposed to occur, at its basis there must lie some idea of reason in accordance with determinate concepts, which determines a priori the end on which the internal possibility of the object rests. An ideal of beautiful flowers, of beautiful furnishings, of a beautiful view, cannot be conceived. (5:232–233)

This argument is quite confusing, for it conflates the claim that the ideal must be a case of dependent beauty with the claim that it must be based on an idea of reason. It is best to consider these assertions separately. As for the thesis that the ideal cannot be a case of free beauty, it appears to follow from the very function that Kant assigns to it. Since the ideal must be a representation of the imagination that can model the same harmonious proportion for everyone, we must ask why Kant is so certain that a case of vague beauty (i.e., a flower, a table, or a landscape that is beautiful in abstraction from any conceptual determination) cannot fulfill that role. A plausible explanation is that *ex hypothesi* we could use no concept to designate in an unequivocal and universally intelligible manner what it is about the sensible form of such an entity that is beautiful. For in the case of a free beauty, the fact that the object instantiates certain concepts is precisely what we have to abstract from in order to appreciate its beauty. Since in such cases the association between beauty and conceptually determinate features is merely accidental, and indeed it has to be severed for beauty to come into view, Kant is right to claim that the free-floating beauty pertaining to such objects lacks the sort of fixity which is required of an archetype that might orientate all humans at all times. Thus the ideal of beauty must be a case of adherent beauty, where the judgment about the subjective purposiveness of the object is bound up with a judgment about its objective purposiveness, that is, its perfection, the

measure of how accurately an object actualizes the concept of what it should be (5:230). Kant seems to think that, by virtue of this combination, the concept of what the imagined perfect object is supposed to be also fixes the aesthetic features responsible for the free harmonious play characteristic of our subjective aesthetic response to it.

This line of thought still does not tell us why the ideal must be a beautiful representation that adheres specifically to an idea of reason. Kant's reason for this stipulation only begins to emerge further on in the paragraph, where he declares:

An ideal of beautiful flowers, of beautiful furnishings, of a beautiful view, cannot be conceived. However, an ideal of a beauty adhering to determinate ends, e.g., of a beautiful residence, a beautiful tree, beautiful gardens, etc., is also incapable of being represented, presumably [*vermutlich*] because the ends are not adequately determined and fixed by their concept, and consequently the purposiveness is almost as free as in the case of vague beauty. Only that which has the end of its existence in itself, the human being, who determines his ends himself through reason, or, where he must derive them from external perception can nevertheless compare them to essential and universal ends and in that case also aesthetically judge their agreement with them: this human being alone is capable of an ideal of beauty, just as the humanity in his person, as intelligence, is alone among all the objects in the world capable of the ideal of perfection. (5:233)

The most opaque part of this passage is Kant's argument for the claim that the idea of a beautiful residence, tree, or garden cannot function as the sought-for ideal. Why does Kant suggest that a beautiful representation of the imagination adhering to the concept of a determinate end would not be determinate enough to serve as a compass of taste? The implied contrast to the human being, construed as an end in itself, suggests that Kant is drawing here on an idea that he develops in the second half of the third *Critique*, in his treatment of external purposiveness in §82–83. There Kant will argue that things in nature, *qua* natural objects, cannot count as final ends but must be conceived by reason as means to the final end of nature (5:426). According to Kant, the final end of nature is none other than culture, defined as the process by which humans acquire the capacity for free self-legislation (5:432). Because reason must think of each natural object as a means existing for the sake of this final end, what it means for a natural object to be a perfect instantiation of its kind is not fully determined by its concept but is ultimately a function of the final end that it serves.

This gap between conceptual and rational determination is in fact entailed by the divide that Kant posits between the understanding (*Verstand*, the fac-

ulty of concepts) and reason (*Vernunft*, the faculty of ends). Kant holds that the objective purposiveness of a particular thing cannot be fully grasped on the mere basis of its concept insofar as it is thought by the understanding. Rather, that purposiveness comes into view only in the context of reason's interminable quest to grasp the system of ends in its totality. For instance, there is a sense in which the mere concept *garden* underdetermines our idea of what a garden should be, since the latter is a function of the final ends that we pursue in using a garden, a clear determination of which would require nothing less than a fully worked-out rational conception of the good life—far more than a mere definition of the term *garden*. Likewise, the concept of a horse underdetermines the purposive organization of the horse, the complete grasp of which would require total knowledge of nature as a teleological system. Since, however, our ideas of teleologically structured totality are merely regulative according to Kant and no finite object can be adequate to them, it follows that no objective concept can fully capture what it means for an object to be a perfect actualization of what it is supposed to be.

Furthermore, because subjective purposiveness is inextricably tied to objective purposiveness in adherent beauties, the concept of an adherent beauty that is not a final end also underdetermines the sort of beauty that attaches to the representation of such an object. If, then, we accept *both* Kant's notion of adherent beauty *and* his theory of external purposiveness, then neither a garden nor a horse could serve as a universal compass of taste, since the indeterminacy of their objective purposiveness also entails the indeterminacy of their subjective purposiveness. As Kant puts it, the beauty of such entities "is almost as free as in the case of vague beauty" (5:233).

It is worth noting, however, that the clause in which Kant adverts to this consideration is preceded by the cautious phrase "presumably because" (*vermutlich weil*). By inserting this marker of tentativeness, Kant leaves open the possibility that there may be other reasons why a representation subsumed under a concept of a determinate end could not serve as the ideal of beauty. Indeed, Kant's emphasis on the conceptually determinate character of such a representation—seemingly at odds with his complaint of indeterminacy—suggests an argument that actually runs counter to that complaint. To see how such an argument might go we must consider a dimension of our response to art that Kant tends to neglect or, worse, flatly deny: namely, the way in which our conceptually determinate awareness of the art form and the genre of the work contribute to our aesthetic enjoyment. As is well known, Kant opposes the rationalist assumption that mere conformity to rules suffices to make an object beautiful. In his discus-

sion of adherent beauty he nevertheless concedes that conformity to rules, or academic correctness of a “mechanical” sort, constitutes an “essential condition” of beautiful art (5:310) and that “taste gains by this combination of aesthetic satisfaction with the intellectual in that it becomes fixed” (5:230). We can see what this implies for the aesthetic importance of genre. For example, when we appreciate the beauty of a sonnet, we respond to the way in which sensible features unique to that singular work interact with its generic, rule-bound aspects to constitute an endlessly suggestive, richly patterned whole. This is another way of saying that the work of art is a case of adherent beauty, whose subjective purposiveness is inseparable from its being a more or less perfect actualization of a determinate concept of the kind of object that it is supposed to be. The concept at play here may be a very specific one such as “still life” or “ghazal,” but it may also be a very general one, as when conceptual art problematizes the very idea of the work of art as a distinct kind of entity. Such objective concepts of the generic sort have the function of focusing our attention upon features of the work that are crucial to its subjective purposiveness, that is, to its aesthetic form.

This point has implications for the ideal of beauty. If it is true that appreciation of the (adherent) beauty of a work of art presupposes the ability to reflect freely on the unique form of the object in light of its generic features, then an aesthetically untutored person who attempted to make a pure judgment of taste about a particular work of art would be ill served by a putative model belonging to another art form or genre. Direct comparison to an aesthetic model instantiating another generic concept could not but constrain reflection by imposing an arbitrary moment of conceptual determinacy, without sharpening our attention to the genre-specific conjunction of beauty and perfection in the object at hand. On these grounds one may argue that, even though a particularly successful poem, musical work or painting might serve as a model for the aesthetic assessment of works of the same kind, it cannot be elevated to the status of an aesthetic archetype in light of which we might adjudicate *all* claims to aesthetic exemplarity, regardless of art form and genre. Although Kant does not explicitly advance this argument, given his penchant for compressing multiple arguments into a single sentence it seems likely that his derivation of the ideal of beauty is informed by an understanding that the idea of a beautiful garden or a beautiful residence would indeed be too determinate, in the above sense, to serve as a universal compass of taste.

On the face of it, this reconstruction of Kant’s thought leaves us with a perplexity. For it now seems that Kant is raising two seemingly contradictory objections against the idea that the ideal might be a representation of a garden, a

house, and so on. The first objection presupposes that the ideal of beauty must be conceptually determinate, while the second stems from the demand that it may not be limited by a determinate empirical concept. However, this way of thinking about the matter has an unexpected interpretive advantage. For it highlights a profound analogy to the “Antinomy of Taste” that Kant will outline toward the end of the “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment.” Since the analogy is not accidental, a brief review of the “Antinomy” can actually point us to the considerations behind Kant’s specification of the ideal of beauty.

On one side of the “Antinomy,” the thesis claims that the impossibility of proving pure judgments of taste suggests that such judgments are not based on concepts. Against this, the antithesis insists that the aspiration for consensus built into the very practice of aesthetic judging shows this practice to be based on a conceptual warrant (5:338). We now see that these rival claims exactly correspond to the seemingly incompatible requirements that the ideal of beauty must satisfy: it must be conceptually determinate without being limited by a determinate empirical concept. Without going into the details of Kant’s highly controversial resolution of the “Antinomy,” I suggest that Kant follows a similar strategy in identifying a unique representation that meets both apparently incompatible desiderata. To put the matter succinctly, Kant claims that both propositions of the antinomy can be maintained without contradiction if they are reformulated with greater precision. According to this resolution, the truth of the thesis is that the judgment of taste is not based on any *determinate* concept; whereas the antithesis can be reinterpreted as recognizing the fact that the judgment of taste is underwritten by an *indeterminate* concept, namely, that of the unknowable “intelligible” ground of the subjective faculties involved in judgment (5:340–341). I suggest that a similar consideration leads Kant to suggest that the ideal of beauty is a sensible representation of the imagination that adheres to an indeterminate concept, namely, the rational idea of human freedom.

Assuming that this connection is valid, the line of thinking behind Kant’s specification of the ideal of beauty can be reconstructed as follows. Since the determinacy of the ideal cannot be that of an object represented under an empirical concept, it also cannot be conditioned by the causal relations (both mechanical and teleological) characteristic of an empirical kind. Rather, the ideal must be a nonarbitrary imaginative representation of an unconditioned entity, that is, an entity designated by an idea of reason rather than a concept of the understanding.³⁹ Now it is relatively easy to show that the rational idea at issue can only be that of the human being considered in his freedom to give himself ends. For, of the three transcendental ideas of reason that designate unconditioned grounds of

representation (the freedom of the subject, the totality of phenomenal objects, and God as the ground of all beings), only the first can be correlated in a nonarbitrary way with an imaginative representation that has sufficient sensible determinacy to serve as a compass for taste.⁴⁰ Whereas the rational ideas of cosmology and theology cannot be adequately exhibited by any object of the senses, it is an essential fact about human freedom that it must be embodied by a living organism subsumed under the species concept *human*, and that its organic embodiment is an object of sensible representation. In other words, the rational idea of freedom has a sensible correlate in the general schema of the human body, a schema that the imagination conceives (according to Kant) by a procedure of averaging individual human shapes encountered in experience (5:234). This schema, which Kant calls “aesthetic normal idea” of the human species, serves as the sensible counterpart of “the idea of reason, which makes the ends of humanity insofar as they cannot be sensibly represented into the principle for the judging of its figure, through which, as their effect in appearance, the former are revealed” (5:233). Whereas the rational idea of humanity is a paradigmatic object of judgments of perfection regarding objective purposiveness (since it concerns the final end of nature), the “aesthetic normal idea” associated with the former is a paradigmatic case of adherent beauty, that is, of subjective purposiveness. The conjunction of these two ideas constitutes the ideal of beauty.

We can now begin to see why the ideal proposed by Kant is immune to both of the objections that preclude the representation of a beautiful garden, a tree or a palace from serving as the ideal of beauty. First, Kant’s ideal is not a case of free beauty because it is wedded to a fully determinate concept of an end, namely, that of humankind. Second, whereas a beautiful garden or a beautiful residence could not serve as an aesthetic paradigm for judging poems or novels with taste because of its undue determinacy, the concept of humankind is not restrictive in this way. For the rational purpose actualized through the life of the human being is not a particular end but the freedom to posit and pursue ends through autonomous agency. As Kant argues in §83 of the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment,” the end of nature in regard to the human species is culture, defined as “the production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom)” (5:431). The ideal of beauty, as Kant defines it, is thus the sensible schema of a unique natural kind (i.e., the human species) characterized by a purposiveness that transcends natural necessity.

A good way to capture the systematic significance of Kant’s doctrine of the ideal of beauty is to note that it conjoins the two species of hypotyposis distinguished in §59:

All hypotyposis (presentation, *subjecto sub adspectum*), as making something sensible, is of one of two kinds: either schematic, where to a concept grasped by the understanding the corresponding intuition is given *a priori*; or symbolic, where to a concept which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, an intuition is attributed with which the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization, i.e., it is merely the rule of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept. (5:351)

We have seen that what Kant calls the “aesthetic normal idea” involved in the ideal of beauty is a sensible schema of a concept of the understanding, namely of humankind as a biological species. However, insofar as this schema may also be recognized as the sensible correlate of an idea of reason that cannot be directly represented, it also functions as a symbol in the peculiar Kantian sense.⁴¹ My interpretation thus locates the ideal of beauty at the juncture between the empirical concept of the human species and the rational idea of freedom—or, otherwise put, between a merely descriptive, anthropological understanding of the human species and the normative, transcendental-philosophical idea of humanity.

What does this interpretation of Kant’s doctrine of the ideal of beauty imply for the actual exercise of taste? Again, we must bear in mind that the ideal is meant to provide us with a touchstone for cases in which we cannot take our guidance from some already established model to decide whether to endorse or reject a model of taste proposed by others and the aesthetic canon that it implies. Such a situation may arise when a child becomes initiated into a historically evolved canon of taste; or when someone who has already undergone such initiation first encounters works that testify to a different aesthetic sensibility; or, finally, in periods of aesthetic crisis when established canons of taste become equivocal or irrelevant. Kant’s doctrine of the ideal of beauty suggests that in such situations we can still rely on the sensible corporeal schema of free humanity, which everyone can produce by an act of the imagination, to determine whether the canon of taste implied by a candidate model is valid or not.

To clarify the basis for this procedure, one ought to recall the role of the body in artistic production in the light of a key presupposition of Kant’s theory of genius. That theory rests on the tacit assumption that artistic production must be structurally homologous to aesthetic response. If, that is, artistic production is to result in a beautiful object, then it must involve a free harmonious play of the mental faculties similar to the pleasurable state we find ourselves in when we reflect on a beautiful object (5:307). In artistic creation, this free mental play

is channeled through the material medium of the body to become objectivized in a work of art. The role of bodily agency in artistic production is obvious enough in such art forms as dance, musical performance, poetic recitation, and sculpture; but even such cerebral and abstract forms of artistic production as musical composition and literary writing cannot fully sever their roots in modes of bodily performance out of which they historically evolved and whose continued possibility they often continue to evoke. The assumption of a basic homology between artistic creation and aesthetic response, together with the role of the body in the former, lend plausibility to Kant's suggestion that the idealized representation of the human body can serve as a paradigm for assessing candidate aesthetic models in every art form and genre.

If, that is, we want to determine whether a putatively beautiful work is indeed beautiful without relying on prior artistic models, it makes sense to ask first whether the mental activity elicited in us by the work is in analogical agreement with the sort of free harmonious activity whose possibility is revealed in the human shape as envisioned in the ideal of beauty. One might, for instance, imagine a listener who has just encountered for the first time that milestone of modern music, Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), finding herself unable to make a judgment of taste by recourse to established models from the history of music. The question of whether *Pierrot Lunaire* is beautiful or not might be rephrased, then, as follows: if we recognize this work as an aesthetic model, can we still continue to acknowledge the axiomatic aesthetic normativity of the general schema of the human shape? Of course different individuals will answer this question differently. Furthermore, it is worth noting that several varieties of radical modernism actually repudiate the aesthetic anthropocentrism implicit in the question, affirming such works as *Pierrot Lunaire* precisely because they project an aesthetic order no longer anchored in the human shape. Yet even if we recognize this limitation of Kant's aesthetics, it appears clear that the anthropocentric touchstone provided by the ideal of beauty constitutes, to Kant's mind, the common ground on the basis of which aesthetic disagreements can arise in the first place.

EXEMPLARY OBJECTS AND THE ARTIFICIALITY OF TASTE

For the purposes of my analysis, the limitations of Kant's doctrine of the ideal of beauty from a modernist viewpoint are less important than its limited function within the framework of Kant's aesthetics. The latter limitation is key to the alignment of nature and history in Kant's aesthetics. It should be clear from

my reconstruction that the doctrine of the ideal of beauty identifies a merely negative touchstone of taste, one that offers a transhistorically valid paradigm by reference to which historically specific models of taste are endorsed or rejected. Since, however, the ideal is an imaginative representation that lacks the vivacity of a sensible manifold given in experience, it cannot activate humans' innate capacity for judging with taste. Indeed Kant himself stresses that the ideal of beauty "does not please because of beauty" but merely identifies a criterion of academic "correctness" (5:235). While correctness so understood constitutes an "indispensable condition of all beauty," it is not possible to derive from it what is "specifically characteristic" in each and every beautiful thing.

The negative character of the ideal of beauty explains a curious fact about Kant's doctrine, which only compounds its obscurity: right after its introduction in §17, the doctrine of the ideal of beauty drops out of the picture. Throughout the remainder of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment," it is not the ideal of beauty but exemplary objects, and specifically exemplary works of art, that are said by Kant to serve as guiding paradigms for the cultivation of taste. Kant does not explain why the exercise of taste should require a multiplicity of actually given models identified through exemplary judgments, above and beyond the capacity for imaginative construction of the ideal of beauty. Yet we can now understand the need for artistic models as a consequence of the merely negative function of the ideal of beauty.

Kant needs the ideal of beauty as a transhistorically valid norm in order to maintain—as he explicitly does in the very last sentence of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment"—that taste can eventually "assume a determinate, unalterable form" (5:356). As a guarantor of this goal, the ideal of beauty is arguably the most important vestige of an ahistorical brand of classicism in Kant's aesthetics.⁴² However, because this ahistorical, meta-level model of correctness can only serve as a negative criterion for the assessment of putative canons of taste but cannot actually awaken taste in someone with an uncultivated sensibility, Kant needs to complement the ideal of taste with concrete models given in sensible experience. Such concrete models are required not only for the activation of taste but also for the elaboration of an initially indeterminate concept of taste into an actually existing common sense; and crucially, as I will show later on in this chapter, Kant understands that only human-made artifacts can serve as such models. To awaken the aesthetic responsiveness of humans and to sharpen their sensibility, encounters with concrete objects are necessary that do not just happen to exemplify the principle of taste (as beauties of nature do) but are actually intended to serve as such exemplifications. The naturally given,

and hence transhistorically valid, ideal of beauty and the historically specific, human-made models of art are equally indispensable to the formation of taste according to Kant.

Although I have previously bracketed the disputes surrounding Kant's attempted linkage between the seemingly disparate topics of taste and cognitive reflection, my interpretation of the notion of exemplarity actually suggests a compelling rationale for that connection. What we can say now is that a judgment of beauty about a given object is exemplary not only with respect to other subjects whose agreement I can demand but also with respect to other objects that may be judged beautiful (by me or others). Both the subjective and the objective aspect of exemplary necessity are at play when Kant claims in §58 that in judging an object to be beautiful or nonbeautiful the power of aesthetic judgment "is itself legislative" (*selbst gesetzgebend*, 5:350), which Kant takes to be the decisive consideration in favor of idealism, as opposed to realism, about the principle of taste. Whereas scholarship on the third *Critique* has tended to stress the subjective thrust of exemplary universality, here I am concerned mainly with its objective significance. In judging an object to be beautiful, I make a determination not only about how other subjects ought to judge about a particular object but also about the meaning of the term *beautiful*, insofar as it is potentially applicable to multiple objects. To that extent, a subject making a pure judgment of taste may be said to be engaged in the formation of a new universal of sorts. The idea that a pure judgment of taste is as much a claim about a particular object as a determination of a universal (though not of a logical concept) is presumably what Hegel has in mind when he suggests that Kant's conception of the beautiful anticipates (however imperfectly, because in the merely subjective register of feeling) the speculative supersession of the opposition between particularity and universality.⁴³

At first glance this way of thinking about the judgment of taste may seem to contradict Kant's claim that beauty is not an objective concept whose meaning might be defined in terms of a genus and a specific difference. However, we do not have to sidestep this proviso to acknowledge the truism that, insofar as the predicate *beautiful* picks out a common feature of beautiful as opposed to non-beautiful objects, it is undoubtedly a universal term. The difference from rationalist aesthetics can still be maintained if we allow for an aesthetic universal that does not define a nomologically distinct class of phenomenal objects.⁴⁴ This is in my view precisely the idea that emerges from Kant's account. Whereas the meaning of a logical concept can be explicated in terms of characteristic relations of mechanical causality that hold between the objects instantiating that concept

and other kinds of objects, the meaning of the term *beautiful* is defined by the object's purposive relation to the subject.⁴⁵ In more specific terms, beauty has to do with the object's purposiveness vis-à-vis the subject's faculties, or otherwise put, with the object's being so constituted as to promote the activity of concept formation in excess of what is needed for the actual formation of a concept. The discernment of this feature does not constitute knowledge. Rather, it may be construed as a noncognitive intimation or disclosure of the conditions of possibility of knowledge, that is, the mutual attunement between nature and our cognitive faculties.⁴⁶

Although beauty is not a possible predicate of cognitive judgments, it is a feature pertaining to some objects and not others. However, in predicating beauty of an object we do not merely apply this concept by means of a determinate schema. Rather, as Kant shows, the predication of beauty is based on an act of free schematization (5:240, 287), and it actually contributes to the ongoing specification of what this predicate means. That is to say, every judgment of beauty is also a reflecting judgment of the form "this is the sort of thing we should recognize as beautiful." The nonconceptual, quasi-objective universality implied in this locution can in its turn be explicated in terms of subjective universality, yielding the somewhat cumbersome paraphrase that "every object *like this* should be recognized as an occasion for a pure pleasure imputable to every subject *like me*." In my interpretation, each of the two uses of *like* in this sentence can be explicated only in terms of the other. In other words, it is no more possible to specify what all beautiful objects have in common without participating in a community of taste than it is possible to draw the limits of our aesthetic community prior to any actual engagement with aesthetic objects.⁴⁷

What underwrites the discussion of pure judgments of taste under the rubric of reflecting judgment is, then, the fact that a pure judgment of taste does not merely involve reflecting judgment but is also itself a peculiar case of reflecting judgment. It involves reflecting judgment insofar as a noncognitive use of the power to form concepts is at play in aesthetic contemplation; and it is a case of reflecting judgment because in judging an object to be beautiful we are engaged in the ongoing specification of the universal, albeit nondiscursive, idea of beauty, rather than merely applying an already determinate concept of it. To be sure, the pure judgment of taste is a unique type of reflecting judgment: the universal formed in the judgment of taste is not a determinate concept (e.g., bitter or red) with a schema that picks out a particular sensible property but an indeterminate universal (beautiful) that picks out what one might call a meta-property, namely, the property of schematizability. More-

over, unlike in standard cases of reflecting judgment, in judgments of taste the formation of the new universal is never completed by an individual judge. Rather, the projection of the new universal is the ongoing work of a community of taste that continually refines its shared sense of what beauty is through paradigmatic acts of evaluation.

This way of thinking about the moment of exemplary necessity can also help us answer the question left open by Kant in a crucial but intriguing passage that occurs at the very end of the fourth moment. In that passage Kant entertains two possible ways of thinking about aesthetic common sense but postpones the decision in favor of one or the other:

Whether there is in fact such a common sense, as a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience, or whether a yet higher *principle of reason* only makes it into a regulative principle for us first to *produce* a common sense in ourselves for higher ends, thus whether taste is an original and natural faculty, or only the idea of one that is yet to be acquired and is artificial, so that a judgment of taste, with its expectation of a universal assent, is in fact only a demand of reason to produce such a unanimity in the manner of sensing, and whether the “should,” the objective necessity of the confluence of the feeling of everyone with that of each, signifies only a possibility of coming to agreement about this, and the judgment of taste only provides an example of the application of this principle—this we could not and cannot yet investigate here; for now we have only to resolve the faculty of taste into its elements and to unite them ultimately in the idea of a common sense. (5:124)

If Kant is evidently reluctant to decide this matter at this point it is because a full resolution would have to invoke the “higher ends” of morality, the relevance of which to the topic of taste will be clarified only in later chapters dealing with the “intellectual interest” in the beautiful (§40) and beauty as a symbol of morality (§59).⁴⁸ However, it should be clear from my account of exemplary necessity that taste is most certainly not an “original and natural faculty” that humans might employ in a more or less automatic fashion. Rather, it is the ability to judge aesthetically with a view to the idea of an aesthetic common sense that has yet to be actualized and consolidated. Every pure judgment of taste is an attempt to lend more definite contours to the idea of aesthetic common sense that orientates the judge, while providing guidance by example for subsequent judgments that might further enhance the determinacy of that idea. Since the principle of taste eludes conceptually explicit consciousness and its application must remain inherently fallible, taste must be “practiced and corrected . . . by means of various examples” and thus undergo a laborious process of “slow and indeed painstaking improvement” (5:312).

When Kant finally arrives at his canonical definition of “taste as a kind of *sensus communis*” in §40, he returns to the idea that taste is an artificial faculty and adds an important nuance. Having reiterated the notion that someone who judges with taste puts himself into the position of everyone else and abstracts from the limitations of his contingent individuality, Kant notes: “Now perhaps this operation of reflection seems much too artificial to be attributed to the faculty that we call the common sense; but it only appears thus if we express it in abstract formulas; in itself, nothing is more natural than to abstract from charm and emotion [*Rührung*] if one is seeking a judgment that is to serve as a universal rule” (5:294). By suggesting that nothing is more natural than the artifice of universality achieved through cultivation of one’s aesthetic sensibility, Kant seems to gesture toward the idea that the cultural work performed through the exercise of taste is necessitated by the very nature of the human animal, that is, by its innate orientation toward a rational universality that is given not as a reality but as a task. After the model of Kant’s famous oxymoron about humans’ “unsocial sociability,” one might call this humans’ natural unnaturalness.⁴⁹ The outlines of such a conception of the relation between nature and culture already began to emerge in Kant’s discussion of the ideal of beauty, defined as a general representation of the visible natural embodiment of human freedom. In a similar vein, Kant answers the objection that the linkage between taste and moral feeling might look “much too studied” by claiming in §42 that the purposiveness without end that pertains to beautiful nature makes us “naturally seek within ourselves” an end within ourselves (5:301). The same idea surfaces again in Kant’s discussion of aesthetic ideas, which we produce according to Kant by letting our imagination work according to principles of reason “every bit as natural to us” as the laws of empirical nature, freely reconfiguring the material “lent to us by nature” and thus “step[ping] beyond nature” (5:314). It is in §83 of the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment” that Kant finally gives his definitive statement of the thesis that the end of nature in regard to the human species is culture, defined as “the production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general [thus those of his freedom]” (5:431).

The historical implications of this view are already apparent in the remarks that conclude “The Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment.” In the last section of his treatment of aesthetics, titled “Appendix: On the Methodology of Taste,” Kant describes the optimal relation between the creativity of genius and the disciplining influence of taste in terms of a happy balance between “natural simplicity and originality” and “breadth and refinement” of culture (5:356). In the same passage, Kant strikingly suggests that this happy balance

between nature and culture has its societal precondition in the unhindered flow of ideas between the lower strata of society and the educated classes. Crucially, Kant gives these socio-aesthetic considerations a historical inflection. Without specifying a particular period or a nation, Kant locates that balance in “the age as well as the peoples in which the vigorous drive towards the lawful sociability by means of which a people constitutes an enduring commonwealth wrestled with the great difficulties surrounding the difficult task of uniting freedom (and thus also equality) with coercion (more from respect and subjection to duty than from fear)” (5:355). This circumlocution, whose vagueness seems deliberate, points to two historical periods. The immediate context suggests that Kant has Greco-Roman antiquity in mind, for the sentence is preceded by the claim that the propaedeutic for all beautiful arts lies not in precepts but in “the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called the *humaniora*.” When one considers, however, that Kant completed the manuscript of the third *Critique* in the months following the storming of the Bastille, one cannot help but hear a distant echo of the French Revolution.⁵⁰ Under the influence of the 1790 French translation of Winckelmann’s history of ancient art, prominent figures of revolutionary France famously invoked the republicanism of ancient Athens, Sparta, and Rome as models for their political project.⁵¹

Regardless of how much weight one accords to this contemporary allusion, however, Kant asserts that the balance between “higher culture and contented nature” characteristic of the period (or periods) he has in mind must remain “the correct standard, not to be given by any universal rule, for taste as a universal human sense” (5:356). This claim is striking. It suggests that the relation between genius and taste cannot be grasped after all as a rigid opposition between unbridled creation and disciplining critique, even if Kant occasionally adopts such a dichotomous view.⁵² Indeed, insofar as Kant derives the theory of genius from the systematically more basic theory of taste, we should not expect to find an antagonistic relation between the two capacities. Although taste does have a restraining role vis-à-vis genius, the yardstick that taste applies in correcting the products of genius is not foreign to the latter. Since the standard of taste is a historically specific balance between taste and genius, it incorporates an acknowledgment of the claims of genial creativity. This is a corollary of Kant’s view that culture is not something imposed upon nature from the outside but the end of nature itself, that is, an inherent teleological tendency that we must attribute to human nature.

Yet the relation between nature and culture that emerges from the “Appendix” is a thoroughly dialectical one in the sense that their ultimate identity must

be grasped from the standpoint of their historically necessary division. Accordingly, Kant has this to say about the paradigmatic status of antiquity:

With difficulty will a later age dispense with that model, because it will always be further from nature, and ultimately, without having enduring examples of it, will hardly be in a position to form a concept of the happy union of the lawful constraint of the highest culture with the force and correctness of a free nature, feeling its own worth, in one and the same people. (5:356)

This classicist credo is consistent with Kant's reformulation of the insight, central to the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, that there is no progress in the arts:

[For genius] art somewhere comes to a halt, because a limit is set for it beyond which it cannot go, which presumably has also long since been reached and cannot be extended any more. . . . The models of beautiful art are thus the only means for transmitting these [the ideas of the artist, by which Kant presumably means aesthetic ideas] to posterity, which could not happen through mere descriptions (especially not in the field of the arts of discourse); and even in the latter case it is only those in old and dead languages, now preserved only as learned ones, that can become classical. (5:309–310)

It would be premature, however, to count Kant to the ranks of the Ancients on the basis of such pronouncements. As the revolutionary echoes of Kant's paean to ancient republicanism might suggest, there is nothing retrograde or nostalgic about Kant's homage to the literature and art of classical antiquity. Why the balance of nature and culture attained in antiquity had to become undone in such a manner as to necessitate the revolutionary attempt at restoration undertaken in France does not become clear until Kant's discussion of culture as the ultimate end of nature in §83. There Kant explains that the progress of culture unleashes an exploitative dynamic, resulting in oppression of the underclass and a corresponding "splendid misery" afflicting a hyper-refined ruling class addicted to "luxury" (5:432). The conflict-ridden conditions of modernity thus could not fail to disrupt the precarious aesthetic balance achieved by the ancients.

Crucially, however, Kant does not see this process in purely negative terms. Rather, he famously argues that the discordant conditions of modernity actually constitute a necessary precondition for the attainment of the end of nature (5:432–434). That end is none other than the sort of "civil society" that will provide the optimal conditions for the labor of culture through which humans transform themselves into free beings who can use reason to give themselves ends. The end of the "Appendix" of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judg-

ment” anticipates the aesthetic corollary to the historical vision outlined in §83. At the very end of the “Appendix,” Kant recalls the complex arguments of the chapters dealing with the intellectual interest in the beautiful and beauty as a symbol of morality to conclude that the merely ideal norm of taste can become actualized only under modern conditions informed by reflective morality: “the true propaedeutic for the grounding of taste is the development of moral ideas and the cultivation of the moral feeling; for only when sensibility is brought into accord with this can genuine taste assume a determinate, unalterable form” (5:356). Kant’s account of the history of taste thus posits a process of formative development. The starting point of this development is a society that lives in unselfconscious agreement with itself and whose products are therefore in self-evident accord with the ideal of beauty, defined by a balance of nature and culture. This initial harmony is bound to be disrupted because of the fundamentally unstable, imbalanced character of human nature—a flaw that is inseparable from freedom. It thus becomes a large-scale cultural task to restore unanimity of feeling in an artificial manner, that is, to cultivate an aesthetic common sense through authoritative judgments about exemplary works of art. The goal of this endeavor is attained when the initially indeterminate ideal of an aesthetic common sense has been actualized and fully specified through such judgments, such that a “determinate, unalterable form” is conferred upon taste.

Construed in this manner, Kant’s thinking about the history of taste already contains the germs of a triadic conception that diagnoses contemporary divisions with a double view to the lost harmony of a “naïve” past and to a reflective reconciliation in the future. Post-Kantian versions of this conception will be developed in Schiller’s treatise on *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, Friedrich Schlegel’s pronouncements on modernity, Hölderlin’s *Thalia* fragment, Kleist’s essay “On the Marionette Theatre,” and in Hegel’s account of speculative reconciliation.⁵³ Anticipating his successors’ reflections on history, Kant asserts the essential difference of modernity from antiquity and accepts the necessity of the estrangement that disrupts our original oneness with nature for the sake of an eventual, higher-level restoration of harmony. Although we must reach back to antiquity for enduring models of taste rooted in nature, it is only as modern subjects, with a moral awareness sharpened by historical experiences of social discord and oppression, that we can render exemplary aesthetic judgments about these models and their modern-day successors, thereby converting the regulative idea of taste into an actual and determinate *sensus communis aestheticus*. In order to develop taste into a stable and enduring principle we must, paradoxically, accept our historical removal from its yardstick and remember

that yardstick from a vantage point of irremediable estrangement. Thus Kant's theory of taste ends on a note that throws into sharp relief the affinities of his conception with the type of resolutely modern, nonimitative classicism that was inaugurated by Winckelmann.⁵⁴

THE CENTRALITY OF ART

While this way of thinking about the role of cultivation and artificiality in the third *Critique* certainly helps make sense of a number of puzzling moves made by Kant, it gives rise to an interpretive problem on another level inasmuch as it sits uneasily with Kant's often-noted privileging of natural over artistic beauty. To be sure, the type of classicism that my interpretation attributes to Kant is nuanced by the aftermath of the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns and hence decidedly opposed to the imitation of precursors. Yet it is far from clear how any kind of classicism might be reconciled with Kant's celebration of nature and nature-given genius, or otherwise put, with the Rousseauian, *Sturm und Drang*-like accents in his aesthetics. To address this issue, I will first review the considerations that motivate the Kantian privileging of natural beauty and then highlight elements of Kant's aesthetics that point beyond that doctrine.

The systematic reasons for Kant's concern with natural beauty are well known. Kant's overarching ambition to bridge the gulf between the moral and the natural-scientific picture of the world leads him to develop his notion of the "purposiveness without an end" pertaining to aesthetic phenomena with an ultimate view to nature's objective purposiveness, i.e., its teleology.⁵⁵ Natural beauty has a more obvious relevance to this systematic aim than does the beauty of art. Indeed the subordination of art to nature is evident in the very premises of Kant's theory of art. By declaring that a product of art cannot be beautiful unless it is perceived as if it were a piece of unintentional nature, and by assuming that this subjective condition cannot be met unless the laws governing the production of the object are nonconceptual and due to the unconscious, nature-given disposition of an artistic genius, Kant may be said to have relegated artistic beauty to a species of natural beauty.⁵⁶

Moreover, Kant expressly declares that natural beauty enjoys primacy over beautiful art in virtue of what in §42 he calls the "intellectual interest" that we take in the presence within nature of things that afford a disinterested pleasure. Since reason cannot be morally efficacious unless nature is so constituted as to allow for a universally shareable satisfaction, and the existence of natural beauties may be construed as a "trace" or "sign" of just such a natural order, morality

dictates that we cultivate a sensibility to the beauties of nature. By asserting the “preeminence of the beauty of nature over the beauty of art in alone awakening an immediate interest,” Kant implies that no such moral interest is associated with the latter.

It is thus hardly surprising that the thesis that Kant’s theory of art is a mere “supplement” to or a “parergonal” extension of his theory of natural beauty has become a mainstay of treatments of the third *Critique*.⁵⁷ This view enjoys the backing of no less an authority than Hegel, who concurred with Schiller, the Jena romantics and Schelling in inverting the Kantian hierarchy of nature and art, and whose highly influential criticism of Kantian aesthetics was underpinned by an extended argument about the deficiency of natural beauty. Hegel contended that the beauties of nature cannot manifest the freedom, the infinitude, the concreteness and the self-conscious subjectivity of Spirit.⁵⁸ Only works of art can give Spirit a visible expression, since their outward form, unlike that of the unintentional beauties of nature, is meant to be perceived with inner comprehension of its spiritual import; or, as Hegel famously puts it, the work of art is “essentially a question, an address to the responsive breast, a call to the mind and the spirit.”⁵⁹ Hegel viewed Kant’s emphasis on natural beauty and his alleged neglect for the meaningfulness of art as symptoms of a more comprehensive shortcoming, namely, Kant’s adherence to the outdated, eighteenth-century conception of taste. Characterized by a preoccupation with the feelings elicited by beauty, this theoretical paradigm was bound to land even a thinker of Kant’s profundity in subjectivism and indeterminacy. In a particularly instructive passage, Hegel summarized his diagnosis by reference to the cultivation of taste:

In this quest [for a specific sense of beauty] it soon appeared that such sense is no blind instinct, made firmly definite by nature, capable from the start in and by itself of distinguishing beauty. Hence education was demanded for this sense, and the educated sense of beauty was called taste which, although an educated appreciation and discovery of beauty, was supposed to remain still in the guise of immediate feeling. We have already touched on how abstract theories undertook to educate such a sense of taste and how it itself remained external and one-sided. Criticism at the time of these views was on the one hand deficient in universal principles; on the other hand, as the particular criticism of individual works of art, it aimed less at grounding a more definite judgement—the implements for making one being not yet available—than at advancing rather the education of taste in general. Thus this education likewise got no further than what was rather vague, and it laboured only, by reflection, so to equip feeling, as a sense of beauty, that now it could find beauty wherever and however it existed. Yet the depths of the thing remained a sealed book to taste, since these depths require not only sensing and

abstract reflections, but the entirety of reason and the solidity of the spirit, while taste was directed only to the external surface on which feelings play and where one-sided principles may pass as valid. Consequently, however, so-called “good taste” takes fright at all the deeper effects [of art] and is silent when the thing at issue comes in question and externalities and incidentals vanish.⁶⁰

In the twentieth century, this Hegelian objection to the very idea of taste and to Kant’s version of that idea was revived in the context of Hans Georg Gadamer’s attempt to develop a universal hermeneutics that might salvage the philosophy of art from the subjectivism of Neo-Kantian theories of aesthetic *Erlebnis*. Whereas Hegel’s arguments against Kantian aesthetics were mainly driven by the philosophical agenda of speculative idealism (which Hegel simply presupposed in his *Aesthetics*), Gadamer also points to tensions internal to Kant’s theory. To be sure, already Hegel’s general comments on taste imply an immanent objection to the latter, one that has to do with the exemplarity of pure judgments of taste. Since, according to Hegel, the notion of disinterested pleasure precluded discursive justifications for particular critical judgments, it could not explain how exemplary judgments rendered in a public setting might advance the cultivation of taste. As a result, aesthetic cultivation had to content itself with the altogether indeterminate goal of fostering the capacity to “find beauty wherever and however it existed.” Gadamer, however, gives this criticism a sharper focus by noting that the putative primacy of natural beauty undercuts the very idea of taste as a faculty of aesthetic discrimination:

[C]onfronted with natural beauty—say, the beauty of a landscape—the idea of a perfect taste is quite out of place. Would it consist in evaluating each natural beauty according to its merits? Can there be choice in this sphere? Is there an order of merit? Is a sunny landscape more beautiful than one shrouded in rain? Is there anything ugly in nature? Or only variously attractive in various moods, differently pleasing for different tastes? Kant may be right when he considers it morally significant that someone can be pleased by nature. But is it meaningful to distinguish between good and bad taste in relation to it?⁶¹

These considerations are clearly inspired by the Hegelian argument about the limitations of natural beauty. However, one does not need to buy into anything as contentious as Hegel’s absolute idealism to appreciate the force of the objection. For one thing, even if one brackets Hegel’s speculative agenda, his memorable comparisons of the work of art to a question and an address retain their phenomenological plausibility. As for the rhetorical questions posed by Gadamer in the previous excerpt, they converge with a mainstay of scholarly

commentary on the third *Critique*. This “standard objection” (as J. M. Bernstein calls it) charges that, if the judgment of beauty is underwritten by universal cognitive conditions, then everything in nature is potentially beautiful.⁶² It is easy to extend this line of thought in support of the claim that nature cannot supply a canon of beauty for the cultivation of taste, simply because it is not an appropriate terrain for aesthetic discrimination.

Contrary to most interpretations of the third *Critique*, in my view Kant’s exposition indicates that he was acutely aware of the considerations just rehearsed. Numerous passages throughout the third *Critique* suggest that the thesis in §42 about the preeminence of natural beauty is not Kant’s last word on the subject of the systematic significance of art. Although, as mentioned earlier, the ideal of taste identified in §17 is an imaginative presentation of the natural form of humanity, the objects to which Kant refers as exemplary are said in that section to be “products of taste,” that is, works of art (5:232). Moreover, it is telling that Kant keeps returning to questions concerning our aesthetic responses to art and art criticism throughout the “Deduction of Pure Judgments of Taste,” while references to natural beauty in that key section remain scant and schematic.⁶³ This textual observation ought to make us question the validity of interpretations that regard Kant’s placement of the theory of artistic genius after the “Deduction” as arbitrary or “structurally negligent.”⁶⁴ Beneath the architectonic surface structure of Kant’s argument one may discern a subtle thematic shift, from a focus on aesthetic response in the four moments of the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” via a preoccupation in the “Transcendental Deduction” with the reception of art and art criticism, to the theory of artistic production that begins in §43. Once the placement of the theory of art within the third *Critique* is viewed in this way, it becomes much harder to treat it as secondary to the aesthetics of nature.

It is one thing, however, to note the persistence of the topic of art throughout the third *Critique*, and another to establish the deeper reasons for this preoccupation. The latter calls for a certain amount of reconstructive work. An important clue as to the considerations guiding Kant may be drawn from the previously discussed claim in §17 to the effect that the ideal of beauty cannot be a case of free beauty. I have suggested that this stipulation is based on the insight that an imaginative representation cannot serve as a normative model unless it has enough conceptual determinacy to serve as a common point of orientation. The scope of this insight can be extended from the meta-level, transhistorical paradigm of taste to its particular, historically specific models. Such an extension yields an argument for the indispensability of art that is Kantian in spirit,

and which accentuates the proximity, rather than the difference, between Kant's aesthetics and Hegel's philosophy of art.⁶⁵ In what follows I will outline just such an argument for the claim that beauties of nature are too vaguely defined to serve as stable and shareable models of taste.

There are three ways in which natural beauty falls short of the requisite determinacy. The first one has to do with framing in the broadest sense, which is arguably a constitutive feature of every work of art. In the absence of a frame, an object of nature as such is not differentiated from its surroundings and hence does not constitute a sufficiently determinate common point of reference. When a vista opening up in a curve of the road makes one exclaim in wonder, it is not necessarily clear to the others which portion of the visual field they are supposed to appreciate. One may object that living organisms, for one, do admit of unequivocal public reference inasmuch as they maintain themselves by differentiating themselves from their environment.⁶⁶ However—and this is the second consideration—all natural objects, including living organisms, are caught in an infinitely ramified web of causal relations, which renders their spatial boundaries as well as their sensible presentation essentially mutable.⁶⁷ The same landscape that looks bleak in February may be beautiful in May.

The third obstacle to shared intending of the beauty of nature has to do with aesthetic response. To the extent that we recognize an object as a work of art, we assume that it was intended by the artist as an instance of a conceptually definite art form, and often as a representative of a particular genre.⁶⁸ These generic concepts imply a set of conventions that govern the aesthetic attitude appropriate to the object. Such tacit conventions specify the vantage point that we are to adopt and focus our attention on aesthetically relevant features of the object. In the visual arts, for instance, these rules may concern the angle from which aesthetically relevant aspects of the physical object come into view as well as the proper distance from which the viewer is supposed to look at the object. Similarly, it is commonly assumed that the musical works of the classical era call for a mode of listening that is particularly attentive to the large-scale diachronic structures of the sonata form. To stress the role of such conventions is not to deny that they may be unclear to some appreciators, or that certain works of art are meant to unsettle our grasp of such conventions. To be sure, criticism can always refocus our attention upon features that tend to be overlooked in conventional modes of appreciation; but such interventions often have the purpose of bringing about revisions in the canon or, more radically, of undercutting the very idea of a canon. Aesthetic exemplarity, at least as Kant understands it, presupposes that the object is defined in terms that make certain modes of

reception binding for every member of the audience. Whereas in the case of art the aesthetic vantage point of the audience can be stabilized by conventions associated with specific art forms and genres, the absence of such conventions associated with beauties of nature is a direct consequence of their unintentional character and works against their exemplary status.⁶⁹

None of this means, of course, that nature cannot be beautiful. Nor does it contradict the idea that by recognizing a piece of nature as beautiful we hold it to exemplify a universal rule, albeit one that cannot be stated. The negative point I want to make is that beauties of nature do not admit of sufficiently stable and determinate public reference to serve as models for the cultivation of taste—at least if they are appreciated as instances of free beauty undetermined by concepts. Moreover, beautiful things in nature that we *do* represent under a determinate concept of an end (i.e., living beings represented under some biological species concept) are also weak candidates for the status of models of taste, although for a different reason. For at issue in such cases is not a pure judgment of taste but a judgment concerning adherent beauty that combines a recognition of perfection with a recognition of beauty, as when I admire a horse both on account of its perfect actualization of the species concept “horse” and on account of the subjective purposiveness of its sensible shape with respect to the animation of my cognitive faculties. Presumably, a beautiful organism of this kind would be a less-than-optimal model for the formation of taste, since only those with a scientifically precise understanding of the relevant species concept would be able to distinguish features of the object that warrant a judgment of perfection from the qualities that make it subjectively purposive and exemplary for taste.⁷⁰ One might argue that the objective criteria of subsumption under a biological species concept are far more complex and hence harder to apply than the objective criteria of an art form or an artistic genre. Consequently, it is easier to distinguish features contributing to the object’s beauty from those contributing to its perfection in the case of a work of art than in the case of a living organism. This makes the former more suitable as a determinate and shareable model of taste.

Finally, I should note a fourth difficulty with natural beauty that has to do with the preconditions of adopting an aesthetic viewpoint in the first place. In at least a handful of passages Kant acknowledges that these preconditions are subject to historical change. The point emerges quite clearly from Kant’s treatment of the sublime, in the context of which Kant draws a contrast between the way in which the Alps are experienced by a Savoyard peasant, who sees their “destructiveness” as “repellent,” and a cultivated traveller, who approaches them with lofty sentiments inspired by moral ideas (5:265). Although this contrast is drawn

in terms of social stratification, its historical implications are clear enough. With growing mastery of nature, confrontations with the threatening side of nature become rarer and hence the room for aesthetic distance expands.⁷¹

There is, however, a countervailing tendency as well. The flipside of improvement in the material preconditions of appreciation for natural beauty is a change in our epistemic situation that actually renders the discernment of natural beauty more difficult. The reason for this is that reflecting judgment is a fundamentally historical faculty. Its free, conceptually unconstrained exercise is subject to the disenchantment of nature, which will be lamented by the romantics and described in more sober terms by Max Weber.⁷² As the web of empirical concepts that maturing individuals must acquire becomes progressively more extensive and elaborate, there is less and less room for experiences that call for the formation of new concepts. Conversely, as the framework of our empirical concepts gives us an ever firmer cognitive grip on nature, it takes an increasing degree of conscious effort to suspend the determining use of judgment in order to exercise reflecting judgment without conceptual constraints. Kant famously opposes the judgment of free beauty made about a flower to the judgment of adherent beauty made about a horse on the grounds that “[h]ardly anyone other than the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is supposed to be” (5:229). Whereas a late eighteenth-century reader presumably would have instantly grasped the point of this contrast, for a contemporary reader to do so he or she must first recall the state of the natural sciences around the time. Steeped as we are in a culture that demands a certain degree of natural-scientific literacy, most of us have a fairly determinate concept of flowers as biological organisms. Kant’s awareness of this transformation registers in an idea adumbrated in the “Introduction” to the third *Critique*, of an age of prelapsarian aesthetic innocence when all of nature was beautiful:

To be sure, we no longer detect any noticeable pleasure in the comprehensibility of nature and the unity of its division into genera and species, by means of which alone empirical concepts are possible through which we cognize it in its particular laws; but it must certainly have been there in its time, and only because the most common experience would not be possible without it has it gradually become mixed up with mere cognition and is no longer specially noticed.—It thus requires study to make us attentive to the purposiveness of nature for our understanding in our judging of it, where possible bringing heterogeneous laws of nature under higher though always still empirical ones, so that if we succeed in this accord of such laws for our faculty of cognition, which we regard as merely contingent, pleasure will be felt. (5:187–188).

Even as growing mastery of nature increases the room required for the adoption of aesthetic distance toward nature, the gain in knowledge that enables such mastery brings about a countervailing development whereby an increasing degree of mental discipline is required for pure aesthetic pleasure. In short, while objective changes in our form of life favor the exercise of taste, parallel changes in our cognitive situation make such exercise more mentally demanding.

As the locus of hindrances to aesthetic appreciation shifts from the object to the subject pole, taste increasingly threatens to become a principle of distinction, not between beautiful and nonbeautiful objects but between cultivated and unrefined subjects. At the extreme point of this development the subject of taste would become an enthusiast who sees all of nature as beautiful. Assuming that nature is the primary domain in which taste is exercised, such a scenario would be tantamount to the impasse threatening so many interpretations of the third *Critique*: if indeed the universally communicable pleasure that registers in a pure judgment of taste stems from the satisfaction of universal epistemic conditions, then—so several commentators have worried—every object of experience must be beautiful. If taste can no longer discriminate among objects, then whatever distinction it still confers upon cultivated subjects will be difficult, if not impossible, to display through public performances of aesthetic judgment. More importantly, if all objects come into view in such a way that their sensible particularity is already saturated by readily available concepts, such that aesthetic reflection requires an increased degree of deliberate effort on the subject's part, then it will be that much harder to attribute the facilitation of this reflective activity to the object and to experience this facilitation as contingent and surprising (in the sense specified in 5:187). The very source of aesthetic pleasure thus comes under threat.

Characteristic of modernity, the rise of this challenge to taste lends art a novel importance. When it comes to art, taste need not and indeed cannot retreat from discrimination among objects. Since works of art have the purpose of eliciting pure pleasure, they claim to be exempt from the grip of readily available concepts. In exchange for this absence of conceptual determinacy they hold out the promise of a harmony unconstrained by concepts. To the extent that they hold out such a promise, however, they can also disappoint it. The aesthetic deficiency of nature has to do, paradoxically, with its inability to disappoint in this way, an inability due to the absence of aesthetic intention. Someone with a sufficiently refined aesthetic sensibility can indeed find everything and anything in nature beautiful. By contrast, the distinction between works that fulfill the

promise of aesthetic experience and those that fail to do so is built into the very notion of art.

In sum, Kant's transcendental grounding of taste in the theory of reflecting judgment entails that taste has a history and that its primary domain under modern conditions is no longer nature but art. In fact, if the above account of the historicity of reflecting judgment is correct, then it follows that we increasingly need the artistic manifestations of *natura naturans* within us as a training ground for taste. This is so even if we maintain with Kant that the beauty of external nature has a more direct bearing on philosophy's architectonic aim to construct a unified picture of the human being. The line of thought developed in this section suggests that even the ability to appreciate natural beauty depends on the ongoing formation of taste through the examples of art. It is perhaps not far-fetched to speculate that a similar line of thought might have led Schelling to the assertion, made a mere decade after publication of the third *Critique*, that "far from the merely contingent beauty of nature providing the rule to art, the fact is, rather, that what art creates in its perfection is the principle and norm for the judgment of natural beauty."⁷³ Kant, to be sure, stops short of this radical thesis. Yet, I hope to have shown that the contours of such a conception begin to emerge when one connects some of Kant's seemingly disparate statements.

SUCCESSION AND PRACTICAL CRITICISM

In the preceding sections I have argued for the thesis that the models of art must play a constitutive role in taste in the Kantian conception. What remains to be clarified is how artistic models actually orient taste. More needs to be said about the attitudes and practices through which the normativity of artistic models is transmitted to and received by successor artists and appreciators. Indeed we have yet to specify the sense in which works of art embody aesthetic norms.

To address these interrelated questions, I propose to turn first to Kant's account of how works of genius influence successor geniuses and then to his frequently overlooked, yet in my view crucial, remarks on practical criticism. To begin, then, with the topic of emulating genius, Kant's most instructive statements on this matter are found in §47. Having defined genius as "the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (5:307), Kant poses the following question:

Since the gift of nature must give the rule to art (as beautiful art), what sort of rule is this? It cannot be couched in a formula to serve as a precept, for then the judgment about the beautiful would be determinable in accordance with concepts; rather, the

rule must be abstracted from the deed, i.e., from the product, against which others may test their own talent, letting it serve them as a model not for copying [*Nachmachung*] but for imitation [*Nachahmung*]. How this is possible is difficult to explain. The ideas of the artist arouse similar [*ähnliche*] ideas in his apprentice if nature has equipped him with a similar [*ähnlichen*] proportion of mental powers. The models of beautiful art are thus the only means for transmitting these to posterity, which could not happen through mere descriptions (especially not in the field of the arts of discourse); and even in the latter case it is only those in old and dead languages, now preserved only as learned ones, that can become classical. (5:309)

Kant here uses the term “copying” (*Nachmachung*) for what he elsewhere in the third *Critique* calls “imitation” (*Nachahmung*), and “imitation” (*Nachahmung*) for what he elsewhere calls “succession” (*Nachfolge*). Harder to remedy than this source of potential unclarity is another one, produced by Kant’s equivocal talk of a “similar” (*ähnlichen*) proportion of the faculties between the artist and his successor. It is natural enough to suppose that Kant is referring here to a unique proportion that can give rise to a reciprocally purposive play between them. Indeed when Kant introduces the notion of the proportion of the faculties in §21, he explicitly writes that this variable has one value that is optimal for the reciprocal animation of the two faculties involved (5:238). Furthermore, in the passage in question in §47, Kant’s restriction of the status of “classical” works to those models of art that were written in “old and dead languages” also suggests that he is interested in narrowing down the range of aesthetically normative objects. To be sure, the sentence containing this latter reference is not without its ambiguities, as signaled by Kant’s equivocal use of the term *klassisch*. In view of the implied distinction between the set of “models of beautiful art” and the subset of *klassische Werke* (classical works), Guyer and Matthews are surely right to translate *klassisch* with the period term “classical” rather than the evaluative term “classic.” However, that translation elides an ambiguity in the sentence that betrays an important unclarity in Kant’s position. For if the sentence merely expressed a historical claim it would have to be deemed a rather baffling *non sequitur* in light of the context. Kant clearly means to make a normative claim as well, to the effect that among models of art those belonging to *classical* antiquity are *classics*, that is, paradigmatic in a stronger sense than are exemplary modern works. Indeed we have seen that Kant explicitly asserts the paradigmatic status of classical antiquity in the “Appendix” to the “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment” discussed earlier in this chapter. And this privileging of a historically highly specific range of artistic products may be taken to reinforce the interpretive hunch that Kant is positing one and only one optimal proportion of the faculties.

However, such an inference would overlook the complementary implication of our problematic sentence, which is that classical/classic works are not the only models of art, only a privileged subset of the latter. It is, in fact, not immediately clear that we can recover sound reasons from Kant's account for the distinction between the strong aesthetic normativity of works from classical antiquity and the weaker normativity of modern art. Nor is it immediately obvious, based on the evidence surveyed thus far, that Kant is consistently committed to such a distinction. The instability of his position is shown by the fact that in §49 the idea of a uniquely optimal proportion gives way to a more relaxed, pluralistic conception. Consider the following passage:

[T]hus genius really consists in the happy relation [*in dem glücklichen Verhältnisse*], which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others. The latter talent is really that which is called spirit [*Geist*], for to express what is unnamable in the mental state in the case of a certain representation and to make it universally communicable, whether the expression consists in language, or painting, or in plastic art—that requires a faculty for apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept (which for that very reason is original and at the same time discloses a new rule, which could not have been deduced from any antecedent principles or examples), which can be communicated without the constraint of rules. (5:317)

Significantly, the notion of a new rule implies a multiplicity of rules. Kant asserts the normative status of this new rule later on in the same section, where he somewhat confusingly changes his terminology to recast the distinction between copying and imitation drawn in §47. In keeping with the terms of the comprehensive distinction established in §32, “copying” now becomes “imitation” and “imitation” becomes “emulation”:

[T]he product of a genius (in respect of that in it which is to be ascribed to genius, not to possible learning or schooling) is an example, not for imitation [*Nachahmung*] (for then that which is genius in it and constitutes the spirit of the work would be lost), but for emulation [*Nachfolge*] by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires *a new rule*, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary. (5:318, emphasis added)

If there were only one aesthetically purposive proportion of the faculties then an original work of art inspired by an artistic precursor could not be thought of

as disclosing a new rule for art and the distinction between imitation and emulation would be untenable. We may thus assume that Kant chooses his words carefully when he writes in §47 that the apprentice artist must be equipped by nature with “a similar [*ähnlichen*] proportion of mental powers” as was his precursor to be inspired by the latter, not that they must be equipped with the same exact (*gleichen*) proportion of mental powers. That is, we must suppose that there are multiple proportions between the imagination and the understanding that can occasion a reciprocally purposive animation of the two.⁷⁴ Similarly to certain mathematical functions, the variable proportion of the faculties must be thought of as having multiple maxima.

The respective proportions of the faculties peculiar to the model artist and his successor are similar, then, to the extent that they both partake of “spirit” [*Geist*], defined by Kant as “the animating principle in the mind” (5:313). Both of these proportions can give rise to “aesthetic ideas,” that is, richly patterned sensible presentations that stimulate the activity of concept formation in excess of what is needed for completion of that operation and which thereby elicit in audience members the same pleasurable self-perpetuating state of playful suspense. Yet—and here psychological speculation becomes inevitable—once an artist’s work has triggered a successor’s capacity for free mental play, the specific proportion of the faculties peculiar to that work will constrain the successor’s response only so long as he or she is actually contemplating the work in question. If the free mental play persists beyond the duration of the aesthetic response, it will tend to become remodulated, as it were, by the proportion peculiar to the successor artist’s mind and hence result in a new act of original production, one that exemplifies a new, nonconceptual rule. When the work of a genius inspires a successor artist in this manner, the new product will share with its exemplary precursor the spirit of free originality, even though the proportion it exemplifies will be a new one. Such a view accords well with Kant’s initial statement in §32 of the difference between imitation and emulation:

Succession [*Nachfolge*], related to a precedent, not imitation [*Nachahmung*], is the correct expression for any influence that the products of an exemplary author can have on others, which means no more than to create from the same sources from which the latter created, and to learn from one’s predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing. (5:283)

In the interpretation that I propose, then, what defines the transferable “manner of conducting oneself” is not a unique proportion common to all works of genius but the formal principle of conformity with the nature-given proportion

peculiar to each genius. This interpretation suggests a line of continuity that connects Kant's theory of genius to the individualistic conception of originality through emulation which was bequeathed upon the authors of the *Sturm und Drang* movement by Edward Young. The classic work is no longer seen as the consummate fulfillment of transhistorically applicable rules; rather, the exemplariness of the classic work in the eyes of the apprentice artist stems precisely from the audacity with which its creator disregarded preexisting rules and schemes, heeding no rule other than the unique, nature-given bent of his mind. This notion of exemplarity opens up the space for a plurality of aesthetic paradigms. Each such model is a valid and compelling example of originality, yet the fruitful attitude toward them is not literal-minded imitation but free, and potentially augmentative, emulation.

The dynamic character of Kant's notion of emulation—what one might call its modernist thrust—is brought into sharp relief by Paul Guyer, who goes so far as to attribute a dialectical view of art history to Kant. Guyer takes Kant to claim that aesthetic response requires not only a freedom from conceptual constraints but also a feeling of that freedom. An aesthetic judgment influenced by the canonical status of a certain work by definition cannot be felt to be free in the requisite sense according to Guyer. As a consequence, “the very status of a classic as an object of society's agreement is self-defeating.”⁷⁵ As Guyer argues, Kant's insistence on the feeling of freedom “introduces a permanent source of instability into the history of art, for the only way for successive generations of individual appreciators of art to secure such freedom for themselves would seem to be by the constant creation of new works of art and new critical opinions for them, or at least constant change in critical opinions about which of the already extant works of art are true classics.”⁷⁶ Guyer draws an analogous conclusion regarding the influence of one genius upon another: since “a work of genius, precisely because it is exemplary, must become the target of rejection by other creators,” canonized classics are the “cause of their own rejection and the stimulus to their own replacement.”⁷⁷

Although Guyer himself acknowledges that his interpretation has a certain broad affinity with Harold Bloom's vision of an Oedipal struggle between a precursor genius and a successor in the grip of the “anxiety of influence,” he summarily dismisses Bloom's model on account of its dependence on psychoanalytic premises.⁷⁸ However, it is difficult to see how Guyer's own interpretation can be defended on strictly Kantian grounds. In particular, Guyer's dialectical account of aesthetic appreciation presupposes an overly demanding, rigoristic understanding of the requirement of felt freedom, which markedly differs from

Kant's own. Guyer construes Kant's talk of "a feeling of freedom in the play" of the cognitive faculties as though this feeling was a cognitive, representational awareness of freedom that precludes acceptance of authoritative models. Since, however, it is central to Kant's account that feelings of pleasure and pain are devoid of cognitive-representational content, the phrase "feeling of freedom" can only refer to a feeling that may be recognized through reflection as arising from a certain kind of freedom. Nor is it necessary to construe the requisite freedom as total. Although the absence of specifically conceptual constraints is undoubtedly central to Kant's account, his model of free harmonious play gives us no reason for ruling out the orienting influence of preexisting models belonging to a societally sanctioned canon. The overstraining of Kant's notion of aesthetic freedom is perhaps most clearly evident in Guyer's assertion that "something as simple as excessive familiarity with an object" suffices to vitiate the freedom of aesthetic response.⁷⁹ This interpretive claim is actually contradicted by the very passages that Guyer cites in support of it. For the upshot of Kant's examples in those passages is precisely that, unlike works produced according to a conceptual rule, properly beautiful objects can provide taste with "lasting nourishment." As Kant puts it: "that with which the imagination can play in an unstudied and purposive way is always new for us, and we are never tired of looking at it" (5:243).

Kant's theory of genius is clearly meant to explain how human activity can yield objects that resist perceptual habituation in this manner. What distinguishes classics from lesser works is precisely their abiding power to surprise us in spite of their familiarity. In the third volume of his *Recherche*, Proust offers a striking illustration of how original art defies the leveling effects of canonization—even in the seemingly derivative area of dramatic performance. When the young Marcel first witnesses a performance by the celebrated actress Berma, his intent anticipation of details applauded by reviewers blinds him to the unforeseeable individuality of the work.⁸⁰ Eagerly awaiting experiential confirmation of his borrowed preconceptions of "beauty," "greatness," and "dramatic force," Marcel instead encounters something singular and unsettling for which he has, as Proust puts it, "no intellectual equivalent."⁸¹ Although Marcel's initial aesthetic stance is a purely imitative one based on the prior judgment of respected critics, the originality of the performance he witnesses ends up chastising his snobbery and eventually calls forth a powerful and genuinely independent response from him. It is precisely this sort of resilient singularity that Adorno has in mind when he points to the enigmatic core of Bach's music, which can again and again puncture the semblance of easy accessibility created by centuries of tradition.⁸²

Because Kant too thinks of beautiful objects, including works of beautiful art, as resistant to the leveling effects of canonization and habit, Guyer's claim that any endorsement of an aesthetic canon would violate the autonomy of the subject of taste is not warranted by Kant's account.

A similar objection can be raised against the dialectical account of art history that Guyer regards as implicit in Kant's statements. In the interpretation outlined earlier in this section, the emulation of a genius by a successor artist begins with a responsive stage defined by a heightening of the successor's mental activity in conformity with the proportion of the faculties peculiar to the precursor's mind; and it concludes with a properly creative stage in which that responsive animation is remodulated in accordance with the proportion unique to the successor. Although this remodulation results in a work exemplifying a new rule of taste, there is, *pace* Guyer, nothing in Kant's account that requires us to think of such innovation as an "artistic revolution" in the subversive sense, involving an outright "rejection" of the precursor's work.⁸³ If these objections are valid, then Kant's conception has less affinity with artistic modernism than Guyer would have us believe. The plurality of aesthetic paradigms, as envisioned by Kant, is not necessarily an antagonistic one.

This preliminary conclusion takes me one step closer to answering the question that arose earlier in this section in connection with Kant's ambiguous use of the term *klassisch*: Can ancient works be said to have a stronger aesthetic normativity than modern ones, without altogether denying the normativity of the latter? Any attempt at clarifying this difficult point must be reconstructive to some extent. The solution I propose requires that we reconsider the historical reflections of the "Appendix" in light of the idea that there are multiple aesthetically stimulating proportions. To that end, I would like to draw attention to a connection between Kant's conception of history and his faculty psychology. The pivotal dichotomy of the "Appendix"—between free nature and lawful constraint brought about through culture—may be aligned with the duality of the imagination and the understanding, the two faculties engaged in the free harmonious play characteristic of aesthetic response. In the section on artistic genius, Kant anchors the proportion of the two faculties in noumenal nature. However, just as noumenally free acts appear in the phenomenal world in the form of causally determined temporal events according to Kant's theory of agency, so the noumenally anchored proportion from which artistic creativity arises is subject to large-scale historical transformations. For Kant's claim about the growing preponderance of culture over nature parallels a key implication of his theory of reflective judgment that has been developed in the previous section: namely,

that the expansion of our conceptual web progressively diminishes the elbow-room of imaginative reflection, and hence of imaginative creation as well.

Assuming that this parallel is based on a genuine connection, the balance between nature and culture that Kant regards as the hallmark of antiquity has its aesthetic counterpart in a harmonious interplay of the imagination and the understanding which is characterized by a balanced proportion. Accordingly, when we aesthetically reflect on an ancient masterpiece, the reciprocal animation of the imagination and the understanding is due to the fact that the work was produced through a balanced interplay of the two. Modern works of genius, by contrast, may be thought of as exhibiting a proportion of the two faculties that is imbalanced in favor of the understanding but nevertheless reciprocally stimulating. While some may balk at the counterintuitive idea of harmonious imbalance—that is, of an imbalanced relation between the imagination and the understanding that has an animating effect on both—it arguably represents the only way to make sense of Kant's distinction between ancient and modern beauty.

This way of thinking about the Kantian model enables us to say something fairly specific about the reason why a modern work of genius is worthy of emulation by successors. For even though each such work embodies an individual proportion of the faculties that cannot be replicated by another artist, it also exemplifies the general, formal principle of creation through free mental play and indeed actually elicits such mental play in the successor's mind. To be sure, insofar as the self-sustaining interplay occasioned by the modern work is premised on an imbalance between the two faculties, there is a sense in which the harmony that it involves must remain compromised and precarious. This is precisely why ancient classics remain aesthetically authoritative in an additional, privileged sense. They exemplify the sole proportion of the faculties that affords a stable and unproblematically harmonious interplay between them. The classics are paradigmatic for modern artists as well as modern audiences because they afford the most perfect form of the sort of harmonious mental play that constitutes beauty. Yet modern works of genius are equally indispensable, since they model for successors the manner in which such a state of harmonious play may be attained, albeit in a problematic fashion, under conditions of modern disequilibrium.

According to the speculative reconstruction just outlined, the conception emerging from Kant's statements posits two complementary species of artistic beauty: an ancient one restricted to a single uniquely balanced proportion of the faculties, and a modern one common to a multiplicity of less strongly privileged

proportions that are aesthetically stimulating by virtue of their varying imbalances. This duality may be taken to anticipate a contrast between the impersonal objectivity of ancient art and the individual, subjective character of modern art that would be variously elaborated by such post-Kantians as Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, and Hegel. If ancient beauty displays the sole harmonious relation of the faculties that is balanced and stable, whereas modern beauty encompasses a diversity of relations whose harmony is compromised by imbalance, then there is a sense in which antiquity and modernity stand in a relation of reciprocal illumination. In Schillerian terms, it is only from the “sentimental” standpoint of modern imbalance that the “naïve” balance of ancient beauty can be recognized as such. Novalis gives this thought a more radical formulation when he suggests that classical antiquity is brought into existence in the first place through the creative vision of its modern students; and it is the same idea that is pushed yet another step further when Schlegel asserts that Winckelmann’s perception of the “absolute difference” between ancient and modern must now be complemented with an insight into their “absolute identity.”⁸⁴

My reconstruction of the Kantian model thus points forward to Schlegel and, via Schlegel, back to Winckelmann. In view of these historical filiations, it becomes possible to position Kant’s aesthetics with respect to the eighteenth-century dialectic sketched out in the opening section of this chapter. Kant conceives of the emulation of modern artistic models in a way that is consonant with Young’s emphasis on innovation, and which allows the emulation of genius to be endlessly iterated, yielding an open-ended line of succession. At the same time, Kant’s claim that classical models possess an enduring authority by virtue of their historical otherness can be said to integrate a broadly Winckelmannian perspective. According to the interpretation developed in this chapter, these are complementary aspects of Kant’s aesthetics rather than signs of an eclectic or half-hearted juxtaposition of proto-romantic and classicist elements.

As already noted, my account crucially depends on the distinction between the formal feature common to all works of genius (namely “spirit,” or the power to elicit an interminable free play) and the specific proportion of the faculties peculiar to the works of an individual genius. In closing, I want to bring this distinction to bear on Kant’s highly compressed, and highly suggestive, remarks concerning practical criticism. That topic features prominently in §34 of the “Deduction,” where Kant embarks on a rather abstract meta-theoretical reflection on the very idea of a critique of taste. Here is the key passage:

[The critique of taste] is the art or science of bringing under rules the reciprocal relation of the understanding and the imagination to each other in the given representation (without relation to an antecedent sensation or concept), and consequently their concord or discord, and of determining it with regard to its conditions. It is art if it shows this only in examples; it is science if it derives the possibility of such a judging from the nature of this faculty as a faculty of cognition in general. It is with the latter, as transcendental critique, that we are here alone concerned. It should develop and justify the subjective principle of taste as an a priori principle of the power of judgment. Criticism, as an art, merely seeks to apply the physiological (here psychological) and hence empirical rules, according to which taste actually proceeds to the judging of its objects (without reflecting on its possibility), and criticizes the products of fine art just as the former criticizes the faculty of judging them itself. (5:286)

This passage is structured by an array of overlapping dichotomies. To begin with a brief summary before proceeding to a more detailed clarification: the distinction between the “spirit” common to all beautiful objects and the proportion peculiar to each is aligned with the distinction between a scientific and an artistic critique of taste and, furthermore, with the more fundamental dichotomy between the transcendental and the empirical-psychological perspective on our mental life. What Kant calls the transcendental-scientific critique of taste inquires into the condition of possibility of pure judgments of taste and grounds such judgments in the formal principle of harmoniously proportioned interplay between the faculties. There is no need to dwell on this project here, for it coincides with that of the entire “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment.” More interesting is the other term of Kant’s dichotomy, namely, the activity of “laying out in examples” the reciprocal purposiveness of the faculties through consideration of “products of fine art” (5:286). It is fairly clear that Kant has practical criticism in mind here. Its task, as Kant describes it, consists in actually performing pure judgments of taste about concrete works of art and describing in empirical-psychological terms how *one* of the optimal proportions is instantiated in the critic’s own reflection upon the work in question. From this we may infer that practical criticism is characterized by an essentially first-personal discourse that registers the deliverances of empirical-psychological introspection to illustrate the transcendental principle of taste.

None of this quite suffices to explain Kant’s characterization of practical criticism as a critique that is “artistic.” To understand Kant’s view of the connection between artistic production and artistic critique, we do well to consider a passage in the “Appendix” that speaks to this very point. Having asserted that in art there is “only a manner (*modus*), not a way of teaching it (*methodus*),”

Kant claims here that imparting this “manner” to a student requires a “severe criticism” whereby the master seeks to “prevent the examples that are set before [the student] from being immediately taken by him as prototypes and models for imitation . . . thus smothering the genius and together with it also the freedom of the imagination even in its lawfulness, without which no beautiful art nor even a correct personal taste for judging of it is possible” (5:355). Kant suggests that the master can preempt imitation by highlighting the inadequacy of every conceptually determinate description through which the student might be tempted to capture the work of art in question. It is only through such chastisement that the master can sensitize the student to the infinite plenitude of the aesthetic idea presented in the work, and hence also to the “spirit” that the student should emulate. We can see that the pedagogical principle underlying this “severe criticism” is exactly analogous to that of the sublime, defined by Kant as the negative, indirect presentation of an unrepresentable infinitude. Just as sublime “passion” frees our mind from captivity to heteronomous “affects” (5:272n), so the sublime lesson of “severe criticism” fosters free succession by making the student resist the pull of rule-bound imitation. If we accept Kant’s historical thesis that the expansion of our web of concepts progressively constrains the space for both imaginative reflection and imaginative creation, then we must think of this type of sublime criticism as increasingly vital to safeguarding the continued survival of art.

Yet an even more robust linkage, indeed an outright identity, between artistic production and artistic critique is suggested by certain passages in which Kant describes the aesthetic emulation of genius in strikingly radical terms. Not only is it the case that someone impressed by a work of genius is “thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality” (5:318) but Kant also claims that an artistically gifted person “needs nothing more than an example in order to let the talent of which he is aware operate in a similar way” (5:309). These claims have the effect of relativizing the difference between aesthetic response and artistic production. In view of this continuity between reception and creation, Kant’s characterization of practical criticism as an artistic procedure begins to make sense. A critic’s psychologically nuanced account of his own response to a work of artistic genius can itself attain the status of original art, provided that the critic lets himself be inspired by the exemplary display of free mental play in the contemplated work. What emerges from a critical engagement of this type is a free creation responding to another free creation, displaying the characteristic nature-given temperament of an original mind elucidated by, and refracted through, another.

When Kant's account of aesthetic emulation (or succession, *Nachfolge*) is thus read back into his remarks about an artistic critique of taste, it does not seem far-fetched to speak of an anticipation of Friedrich Schlegel's demand that art criticism must be art raised to the second power, most concisely expressed in the *Critical* fragment no. 117: "Poetry [*Poesie*] can be criticized only by way of poetry. A critical judgement of an artistic production has no civil rights in the realm of art if it isn't itself a work of art, either in its substance, as a representation of a necessary impression in the state of becoming, or in the beauty of its form and open tone, like that of the old Roman satires."⁸⁵ This is not to suggest that Kant's statements contain a full-fledged formulation of the Schlegelian concept of criticism. Yet the Kantian linkage between artistic production and practical criticism certainly establishes a key component of the Schlegelian view. Moreover, even where Schlegel departs from the Kantian premises, the distinction elaborated by Kant allows us to state the significance of this departure in precise and illuminating terms. In particular, since Schlegel thinks that great works of art (at least those of the modern age) always enact a transcendental-philosophical reflection upon the very conditions of art, his relativization of the difference between art and art criticism also points toward a cancellation of the Kantian dichotomy between practical criticism and the transcendental critique of taste.⁸⁶ Schlegel thus envisions a critical practice that subsumes within itself both artistic production and philosophical reflection on art. On this view, a transcendental-philosophical grounding of art must take the form of a practical criticism that is productive and acutely sensitive to the dialectic of ancient and modern.

Nothing could be further from Kant's mind, to be sure, than such a subversion of the distinction between practical criticism and the transcendental-philosophical critique of taste. Kant's commitment to a strict separation between the two should be obvious from the fact that his own "scientific" critique of taste makes do with cursory remarks on the topic of practical criticism. The brevity of these remarks, however, should not mislead us into underestimating their systematic significance. We can bring this significance into sharp relief by briefly recalling the central claims of the interpretation developed in this chapter. Since taste is a faculty that needs models for its cultivation, and since the ideal of beauty fulfills this function in a merely negative sense, exemplary works of art must play a vital orienting role in the exercise of taste. Their role is not limited to the pedagogical one of initiating individual subjects into the normativity of taste. Rather, the acts of aesthetic judgment by which exemplary works are recognized as such also have the function of furthering the historical process

whereby the ideal norm of taste is actualized and endowed with determinate content. The cultural practice through which this task is discharged is practical criticism, or what Kant calls the artistic critique of taste. As we have seen, this critical practice does not only shelter the creativity of genius from a species of influence that results in sterile imitation but it can also actually issue in an original creation of genius.

In a recent essay Karl Ameriks argues that the aesthetic turn of modern philosophy and its historical turn can both be traced back to late eighteenth-century Jena.⁸⁷ For the writers active in this context, progress in philosophy was fundamentally dependent on an understanding of one's historical relation to one's predecessors, whose theories had to be grasped as prefigurations of ongoing innovations. Moreover, for the writers who may be called romantic in the broadest sense of the term, insight into the fundamentally receptive character of the subject's self-relation—typically described in the wake of Kant as a non-representational “feeling of self”—tended to entail an unprecedented degree of investment in aesthetic experience. As Ameriks argues, this aesthetic turn also came to inflect the historicism of the romantics, for they understood that the appropriation of precursor theories must be informed by a sensitivity to the elusive subjective dimension out of which such theories emerged, as well as to the ways in which the affectively colored style of each predecessor contributed to his influence on successors. Ameriks thus treats the aesthetic turn and the historical turn of philosophy as distinct tendencies in post-Kantian philosophy that converged in Romantic theorizing. If, however, the interpretation developed in this chapter is correct, then a historical turn of sorts is inscribed within aesthetic thought itself already at the moment of its inception in Kant's third *Critique*. For in that work Kant does not only assert that aesthetic experience is a systematically central dimension of human mindedness, disclosing the hidden unity of our normative orientations as knowers and agents, but also shows that dimension to be inherently historical. Original artistic creation no less than spontaneous aesthetic response presuppose receptivity toward works of art from the past whose paradigmatic status derives from antecedent acts of critical evaluation.

In bringing out the historical implications of Kant's theory of taste and insisting on the centrality of art to his conception, I have again and again moved beyond the overt arguments of the third *Critique* and ventured on the somewhat perilous path of reconstructive interpretation. This way of proceeding has enabled me to highlight junctures in Kant's argument where lines of thought begin that will be continued by such successors of Kant as Schlegel, Schelling, Hegel and Gadamer. My reading of the third *Critique* has thus brought to the

fore a general feature of Kant's philosophy. Connected by labyrinthine relations of reciprocal implication that often lie beneath the surface of the text, Kant's doctrines fit together to constitute an architectonic whole that is closed insofar as it possesses a rare degree of internal consistency. Since, however, the unity of its parts is not immediately perspicuous, this system is also radically open to constructive interpretation. In view of this observation, one may wonder how the dialectic of succession and originality at the heart of Kant's aesthetics played out in the reception of Kant's thinking by his successors. I take up this question in the following chapter.

2

KANTIAN REVISIONISM AND REVISIONIST KANTIANISM

KANT ON BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Well over two centuries after Kant completed his critical trilogy there is still no end in sight to the contestation surrounding his legacy. This is only partly to be explained by the originality and the intricacy of his arguments. When one surveys the voluminous literature on Kant, it quickly becomes apparent that the most heated debates among his commentators stem from disagreements over how his works demand to be read in the first place. And if there is no uncontroversial answer to this question, this is because Kant's own views regarding the philosophical enterprise and the role of writing in its pursuit are fraught with tension.

Kant's official doctrine appears to be that philosophical insight is ahistorical, beholden only to the timeless principles of reason. Such is the position taken by Kant in his 1790 polemic against the philosopher Johann Augustus Eberhard, for instance, in the context of which Kant contrasts the normative *authority* of literary classics with the *autonomy* of rational inquiry in philosophy:

If it ever occurred to anyone to rebuke Cicero because he did not write good Latin, then some Scioppius (a grammarian reputed for his zeal) would put him pretty firmly, though properly, in his place; for what constitutes good Latin we can learn only from Cicero (and his contemporaries). But if anyone believed himself to have found an error in Plato's or Leibniz's philosophy, indignation that there should even be some-

thing to criticize in Leibniz would be ridiculous. For what is philosophically correct neither can nor should be learned from Leibniz; rather the touchstone, which lies equally to hand for one man as for another, is common human reason, and there are no classical authors in philosophy.¹

It would be hard to put the case more bluntly. Cicero is a classic because, rather than being subject to literary norms, he set the very norms by which authors writing in Latin are to be judged. No such authority is conceivable in the sphere of philosophy, or so Kant claims. The autonomy of reason means that the only constraints on philosophical inquiry are the universally valid, purely formal criteria of self-consistent thought, such as the principle of sufficient ground and the principle of noncontradiction, which are neither dependent on tradition nor open to innovation. This view anticipates the sort of antihistoricism that used to characterize analytic philosophy in its most hubristic heydays, when it could be credibly claimed that the works of Aristotle and Kant were no more relevant to philosophical inquiry proper than the works of Paracelsus to modern chemistry.

However, there is another side to Kant's thinking on this matter. Throughout the critical trilogy, Kant displays a keen awareness of the fact that he is writing at a critical moment in the history of philosophy, one that calls for an authoritative adjudication of contesting claims. Almost invariably, Kant's arguments respond to positions expounded by his predecessors, and in particular to the two major alternatives available to him from the recent history of philosophy, namely, rationalism and empiricism.² Moreover, every now and then Kant characterizes his very manner of doing philosophy in terms that acknowledge his indebtedness to precursors. Strikingly, Kant's adamantly antihistoricist polemic against Eberhard was published in the same year as the third *Critique*, in which (as I noted at the beginning of the previous chapter) Kant advanced the remarkable claim that progress in every cultural domain depends on the free emulation of exemplary precursors. Although in the passage in question Kant did not explicitly apply this principle to the practice of philosophy, the comprehensive scope of his statement leaves no doubt as to its relevance to philosophical inquiry.

Indeed already in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Kant explicitly described his philosophical work as following in the footsteps of Christian Wolff (BXXXVI). This claim is all the more remarkable because otherwise Wolff's brand of dogmatic rationalism mainly figures in the first *Critique* as a polemical target. As Kant makes it clear in the preface to the second edition, however, what he opposes is not the "dogmatic procedure" of proceeding from rationally demonstrable *a priori* principles but "dogmatism,"

the doctrine that results when the dogmatic use of reason is not restrained by antecedent critical reflection upon the limits of reason. Accordingly, Kant's repudiation of Wolff's doctrine is thoroughly compatible with the praise he accords Wolff for giving "us the first example (an example by which he became the author of a spirit [*Geist*] of well-groundedness in Germany that is still not extinguished) of the way in which the secure course of a science is to be taken."³

What we have here, then, is a key application of the Pauline distinction between the spirit and the letter—which will soon play a highly consequential role in the reception of Kant's works as well. Kant's talk of exemplarity highlights the close alignment between this use of the spirit/letter dichotomy and the emulation/imitation distinction that the third *Critique* will develop with a primary (though not exclusive) view to artistic production. Both art and philosophy depend for their continuation on the possibility of encountering and freely appropriating exemplary achievements from the past. Although that dependence is particularly strong in the aesthetic domain, the hermeneutic distinction between spirit and letter, most obviously relevant to the sphere of art, also turns out to inform Kant's views on the employment of reason. In the context of Kant's theory of art as well as in his reflections on the history of philosophy, the term *spirit* stands for a principle of mental animation, while *letter* stands for the fixed particulars that prompt, or are produced through, such activity. Whereas emulation is a mode of succession that propagates the spirit at work in the precursor's work, imitation takes its guidance from the letter alone. Accordingly, in his polemic against Eberhard, Kant likens those who fail to correct inconsistencies in the Leibnizian system to "imitators" (*Nachahmer*) who adopt even the speech defects and the gestures of the venerated person.⁴

This analogy needs to be qualified, however, in view of a complication noted in the previous chapter. I have argued for a construal of Kant's theory of art according to which spirit in the aesthetic sense is compatible with multiple dispositions of the faculties rooted in noumenal nature. This is why the emulation of the example provided by an artistic predecessor can lead to the creation of a "new rule" of art, an innovation that Kant takes to be the defining feature of artistic originality (5:317). Spirit in the aesthetic sense thus encompasses a potentially endless series of new rules, a series that is not progressive but purely iterative. By contrast, it is quite clear that Kant regards the "secure course of science" as a progressive one, allowing Leibniz to improve on Plato and Kant in his turn to surpass Leibniz.

This aspect of Kant's position is thrown into sharp relief by one of Kant's rather infrequent reflections on the proper understanding of philosophical pre-

cursors. The passage in question occurs in the first *Critique*, in the section of the introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic titled “On the ideas in general.” Kant here defends his modernizing reading of Plato’s theory of ideas as an anticipation of his own doctrine of the ideas of reason: “I note only that when we compare the thoughts that an author expresses about a subject, in ordinary speech as well as in writings, it is not at all unusual to find that we understand him even better than he understood himself, since he may not have determined his concept sufficiently and hence sometimes spoke, or even thought, contrary to his own intention” (A314). Kant does not pretend to be breaking new hermeneutic ground here. He identifies a supposedly common interpretive practice that tends to take place in ordinary conversation as well as in textual interpretation. To that extent, Otto Friedrich Bollnow may be right in suggesting that Kant’s statement is meant less as a novel thesis than as the reformulation of a widely accepted rule of thumb.⁵ Kant’s statement is interesting less because of its originality than because of the invitation it extends to the reader to apply the principle in an iterative manner, thereby legitimizing the interpretive angle that the later idealists were about to bring to Kant’s own work.

The possibility of this sort of extension is opened up by the short phrase that concludes the sentence in the original: the suggestion that an author “sometimes spoke, or even thought [*oder auch dachte*], contrary to his own intention” (A314). It is a relatively straightforward truth that one’s manner of expression may occasionally distort or obscure the intended meaning and that in such cases someone else may be able to put the idea more clearly than the one who first conceived it. This is simply a matter of different degrees of mastery of, or attention to, language. It does not warrant the claim that we may understand an author better than he understood himself. The idea, however, that you may understand me better than I understand myself because the very drift of my *thinking* went against my original conception—this implies either that my knowledge of my original intentions is prone to error, forgetting, and distortion or that I have limited control over the thought processes issuing from that original intention.⁶ Both implications are consistent with Kant’s critique of Cartesian self-transparency in the chapter on the so-called paralogisms of rational psychology.

However, the highly abstract epistemological argument of the chapter on paralogisms seems less directly relevant to Kant’s claim about better-understanding than does a far more specific consideration about the relation between language and thought. Without citing the entire dense passage here, let me instead give an analytical outline of the central claims made or implied by Kant in support of his statement about better understanding:

1. Finding the right expression for a thought is of paramount importance.
As Kant writes: "In the great wealth of our languages, the thinking mind nevertheless often finds itself at a loss for an expression that exactly suits its concept, and lacking this it is able to make itself rightly intelligible neither to others nor even to itself" (A311).
2. For any given thought there is only one "suitable" (*angemessene*) linguistic expression.
3. Conversely, although the meanings associated with a given word may undergo considerable modification during the history of its use, there is only one meaning "that is proper to it" ("its proper meaning").
4. There is no guarantee that the person who originally coined a term *consistently* used it in this "proper" sense ("even if the ancient use of this expression has become somewhat unsteady owing to the inattentiveness of its authors"). In fact there is no guarantee that whoever introduced the term *ever* used it in its proper sense ("even if it is doubtful it always had exactly this sense"). We may infer that for Kant, even though new meanings may become associated with a word as a result of changes in usage, the one and only *proper* meaning of a word is independent of usage.
5. It is arrogant to assume a legislative role with respect to language. The invention of new terms of art can only result in unintelligibility. If there already exists a word appropriate to the concept thought by a philosophical author, then it is a mistake to treat that word merely as one among many synonyms. Instead, the word in question should be used as the privileged signifier for the concept in question; "for it may otherwise easily happen that when the expression does not particularly occupy our attention but is lost in a heap of others having very divergent meaning, the thought which it alone can preserve may get lost as well."

As one takes stock of these claims one can begin to see the point of Hamann's remarks about Kant's neglect for the historicity of language. For what emerges from the above reconstruction is a one-to-one correspondence between *proper* meanings and *proper* words that does not change over time. As a consequence, the proper meaning of a word, fixed as it is independent of concrete historical contexts, functions as a thoroughly rigid criterion of correct usage for Kant. At the same time, Hamann's contention that Kant overlooked the linguistic character of thought does not seem entirely justified. Although Kant posits a nonhistorical criterion of correct language use, he does not deny that the secondary

meanings associated with a word are subject to historical change. Correspondingly, he recognizes the possibility that new words might emerge that can at the very least imperfectly capture the meaning of a concept for which a proper word is already in currency. Nor does Kant deny that such changes can be of great consequence. Because thought vitally depends on language according to Kant, the wrong choice of word can lead to confused thinking, with the result that the author fails to make his idea fully intelligible even to himself. In such cases the author's original insight becomes distorted or occluded by the manner in which he elaborates it.

Toward the end of the first *Critique*, in the chapter entitled "The Architectonic of Pure Reason," Kant goes as far as to suggest that such self-misprision resulting from flawed exposition is the rule rather than the exception. For this reason, Kant suggests, the appropriation of a significant thinker's legacy always involves a hermeneutic effort, which is at the same time an exercise of critique:

Nobody attempts to establish a science without grounding it on an idea. But in its elaboration the schema, indeed even the definition of the science which is given right at the outset, seldom corresponds to the idea; for this lies in reason like a seed, all of whose parts still lie very involuted [*eingewickelt*] and are hardly recognizable even under microscopic observation. For this reason sciences, since they have all been thought out from the viewpoint of a certain general interest, must not be explained and determined in accordance with the description given by their founder, but rather in accordance with the idea, grounded in reason itself, of the natural unity of the parts that have been brought together. For the founder and even his most recent successors often fumble around [*herumirren*] with an idea that they have not even made distinct to themselves and that therefore cannot determine the special content, the articulation (systematic unity) and boundaries of the science. (A834)

Kant's distinction between the kernel of rational truth in a writer's original idea and the fallible conceptual scheme in terms of which the writer unfolds that idea is typical of what Gadamer calls *Sachkritik*, a hermeneutic attitude defined by the aspiration to capture the truth of the matter at hand.⁷ The paradigmatic domain of this hermeneutic is not philology but philosophy, or more broadly speaking scientific discourse. Indeed in the discussion of Plato quoted earlier, Kant explicitly denies that his reading of Plato relies on a philological reconstruction of Plato's self-understanding: "I do not wish to go into any literary investigation here, in order to make out the sense which a sublime philosopher associated with his word" (A313). What Kant means by the author's intention or idea (in this case, Plato's idea of "idea") should not, however, be understood as connoting a purpose brought to clear consciousness. Not subject to the vagaries

of an individual mind, the original idea in question is defined in reference to the universal vantage point of a science constructed on the sole unassailable basis of reason's noncontradiction with itself. To the extent that the idea was conceived with a view to shareable insight and its topic is of general interest, its content is rooted first and foremost in the universality of reason ("*in der Vernunft selbst gegründet*"). This means that the individual author has no privileged access to his idea, indeed that it can be called "his" in a limited sense at best.

Because human authors are fallible and finite reason cannot do without the aid of language, an infelicitous choice of terms on the writer's part may cause his thinking to deviate from his original conception. There is indeed nothing shocking in the discovery that Leibniz occasionally erred, so long as we remember the point expressed in Kant's lapidary formulation that "there are no *classical authors* in philosophy."⁸ The universal validity of rational criteria allows us in such cases to recognize the author's fallacies—which is why Kant refuses to concede absolute authority to his philosophical predecessors. Since a philosophical author's idea was conceived with a view to the systematic interests of reason, common to all humans, one can always recover the underlying idea and even reach a correct articulation by attending to the "natural unity of the parts"—by following, in other words, the architectonic dictates of reason *in oneself*. According to this model, reconstructing an author's idea is first and foremost a matter of reason's self-elucidation—what Kant calls *Selbstdenken*—rather than an encounter with an outlook different from one's own. It is thus hardly by chance that in the first *Critique* Kant chose to propound this view of philosophical interpretation by way of an analogy to Plato's theory of ideas. One might say that articulating the latent, maximally rational meaning of another's statement is Kant's version of Socratic midwifery (maieutics)—that is, the art of eliciting from the interlocutor an insight that the latter carries within his soul, unbeknownst to himself or sensing only the "birth pains" announcing a nascent idea.⁹

Kant's most incisive statement of this hermeneutic approach occurs in the concluding sentences of the polemic against Eberhard:

In this way, then, the *Critique of Pure Reason* might well be the true apology for Leibniz, even against those of his disciples who heap praises upon him that do him no honor; as it may also be for sundry older philosophers, whom many an historian of philosophy—for all the praise he bestows on them—still has talking utter nonsense; whose intention he does not divine, in that he neglects the key to all accounts of what pure reason produces from mere concepts, the critique of reason itself (as the common source of all them), and in examining the words they spoke [*Wortforschen*], cannot see what they had wanted to say.¹⁰

The dichotomies of spirit versus letter and emulation versus imitation are here correlated with a further distinction between two disciplines: on the one hand, the genuinely philosophical reconstruction of what a given author wanted to say and, on the other, the study of the author's flawed formulations by historians of philosophy. Whereas in Kant's qualified homage to Wolff the hermeneutics of spirit underwrites a measured recognition of the precursor's achievement, in the polemic against Eberhard he deploys the hermeneutics of spirit to assert the primacy of present-day philosophy before the historiography of philosophy, invoked here in a purely pejorative sense.

FICHTE AS EXPLICATOR OF KANT

The ambivalence just noted is not incidental. Kant's endorsement of better-understanding would prove to be a double-edged sword throughout the reception history of his own works. Already Hamann remarked in the short notice that he drafted a mere six weeks after the publication of the first *Critique*—which was actually the first written reaction to the work—that Kant's remarks about better-understanding Plato could easily be turned against him.¹¹ Similarly to several other items of Hamann's metacritique of Kant, this remark too anticipated a *leitmotif* in the later idealists' critical appropriation of Kant. Spurred by a blend of fascination and dissatisfaction with the Kantian project, Kant's most philosophically astute readers did not hesitate to turn the principle of better understanding against him. In view of Kant's remarks concerning the propaedeutic function of critique and the decline of his intellectual powers following completion of the critical trilogy, Kant's project was widely considered incomplete. More importantly still, in an era of heady intellectual excitement, Kant's heirs saw a glaring discrepancy between the revolutionary force of his insight and the pedantic mindset reflected in his endlessly proliferating distinctions, fastidious qualifications and tortuously convoluted elaborations.

Schlegel's remarks from 1796–1798 are typical of this impatience: “The more important the matter in Kant and the more profound his thought, the worse and more confused [the] presentation. He cannot produce it, keeps turning this way and that and choking it up a hundred times, each time differently and never in a clear form,” Schlegel complained. This was no mere stylistic defect: “What one cannot communicate one does not properly know yet.”¹² In the same remarks Schlegel asserts that “everywhere Kant stopped halfway” (*Kant ist überall auf halbem Wege stehen geblieben*). This failure of nerve was bound to seem especially damning in the eyes of Fichte and his followers, for whom the reluctance

to think a thought to its logical conclusion betrayed a moral defect. Schlegel summed up the judgment of an entire generation of readers when he described Kant as “a pedant of genius.”¹³

Yet these alleged shortcomings of Kant’s personality, reflected in his style, would have been of little consequence for these critics if they were not thought to impose debilitating constraints upon his philosophy. Radicalizing the influential critique leveled against Kant by Karl Leonhard Reinhold in the early 1790s, members of the Jena circle, with Fichte at its center, became convinced that Kant had stopped short of realizing the ultimate import of his arguments. They claimed that Kant’s dualisms, the strict divisions of his architectonic and the apparently arbitrary nomenclature of his faculty psychology all bore witness to a failure to turn philosophy into a truly systematic science based on a unitary principle. Although Fichte and his followers praised Kant for having proposed self-consciousness as the first principle of philosophy, they charged that Kant had left this principle insufficiently defined and disfigured by the limitation of the mind-independent thing-in-itself. In the forefront of their objections was the notion of intellectual intuition. Kant had introduced that notion in a purely hypothetical sense, to designate that power whose lack defines finite cognition as opposed to divine intelligence. Whereas human thought is discursive, that is, restricted to abstract universals that need to be supplemented by the data of sensible receptivity, an intellectually intuiting mind would think concepts that fully determine the particulars contained under them. The post-Kantian idealists contended that Kant had effectively presupposed the reality of intellectual intuition without realizing it.

Although there is admittedly something counter-intuitive about the supposition that a philosophical conception is not truly understood by its author, it is no accident that this sort of criticism should have appeared so plausible in Kant’s case. Nor was this criticism meant merely as a diagnosis of Kant’s personal shortcomings. It touched, rather, on a constitutive difficulty attendant on the kind of investigation he was engaged in. In its effort to carve out a domain of knowledge which is not based on experience and which nonetheless rests on solid foundations, transcendental inquiry cannot unproblematically rely on the language of everyday experience. Transcendental reflection is born of the assumption that the conditions of possibility of experience lie outside the realm of possible experience. Outside of possible experience, however, the use of our categories is restricted to pure thought, which on its own cannot give us contentful knowledge of things. It then becomes difficult to get clear about, say, the precise sense in which the thing-in-itself can be said to exist at all and ground phenomena,

or the sense in which the transcendental subject can be known to be active. Kant's preoccupation with the conditions of possibility of experience continuously pushed his thinking to the brink of what can be coherently thought and conveyed in language. Kant himself admitted that his powers of expression were not equal to the task that he faced; and he clearly recognized the dangers of a discrepancy between language and thought when, in the passage preceding his invocation of Plato in the chapter "On the ideas in general," he considered the consequences of the failure to find the right expression for a given thought. An author whose thinking ventures beyond what can be safely expressed runs the risk of losing control over the movement of his own thought and eventually departing from his original intentions or distorting them. A train of thought that becomes unhinged from its linguistic medium in this manner is bound to lose its transparency to the reader as well. Since transcendental philosophy stands in a problematic relation to language, it is, as Friedrich Schlegel suggests in a note, perennially prone to misunderstanding itself.¹⁴ Kant's mistakes, as Schlegel remarked in an 1812 essay on Hamann, stemmed from his presumptuous (*anmaßend*) claim to have mastered a truth toward which he was merely struggling to feel his way.¹⁵ Some such recognition that the putative shortcomings of Kant's philosophy went beyond matters of literary exposition and had to do with the very course that Kant's thinking took might help explain the mixture of humble reverence and iconoclasm that characterized the German idealists' stance toward Kant.

And yet the first generation of German idealists never doubted the significance and the ultimate truth of the insight intimated by Kant. Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling saw themselves as Kant's true successors who followed Kant's lead. Putting the matter in terms of Kant's own definition of succession in §32 of the third *Critique*, one might say that these successors created "from the same sources" from which Kant had created and learned from him "only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing," following his lead to find "their own, often better course" (5:283). Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel all claimed to remain loyal to the spirit of Kant's philosophy while departing from its allegedly flawed letter.¹⁶ The self-declared guardians of the Kantian spirit polemically distanced themselves not only from the slavish imitations produced by orthodox Kantians but also from Kant's own flawed execution of his project. This first, crucial stage of post-Kantian speculative philosophy can thus be seen as a sequence of immanent critiques of Kant aimed at understanding Kant better than he himself, that is, at reconstructing his philosophy in a more internally coherent, systematic fashion and on the basis of a single, self-evident first principle.¹⁷

Throughout this period, Kant remained a definitive point of reference, and the appropriation of his thought repeatedly gave rise to intense thought concerning the preconditions and criteria of correct understanding. Thus Fichte's *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie* (1794), a propaedeutic work that was meant to herald the systematic exposition proper, opens with the modest-sounding assurance that it is nothing but an elucidation of Kant's insight. Fichte writes: "I realize that I will never be able to say anything which has not—directly or indirectly and with more or less clarity—been indicated by Kant. I leave to future ages the task of fathoming the genius of this man who, often as if inspired from on *high*, drove philosophical judgment so decisively [*gewaltig*] from the standpoint at which he found it toward its final goal."¹⁸ This passage introduces two central motifs of the idealist reception of Kant: the idea that genial inspiration led Kant to anticipate an insight that he did not fully master; and the idea that the task of sounding Kant's depths cannot be instantaneously achieved but instead calls for a more advanced stage in the development of philosophical thinking. In his second and most systematic statement of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the 1794 *Grundlage*, Fichte reiterated that the new-fangled method and vocabulary of this work conveyed nothing but the Kantian philosophy.

Any evaluation of this claim would require a more substantial examination of the *Wissenschaftslehre* than I can offer here. Although I will indicate some of the specifics of the Fichtean view later on in this chapter and in chapter 3, my main concern is with the hermeneutic tenets underlying Fichte's engagement with Kant. Some of these tenets he articulates with great care, while others remain implicit in his discussion. In the same year in which the two initial formulations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* appeared, Fichte began a series of letters titled *Über Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie* that were intended to vindicate his revisionist approach to Kant against charges of willfulness. In deploying the Pauline distinction between the letter and the spirit, Fichte resorted to a hermeneutic principle endorsed by Kant himself (which are discussed in more detail in chapter 3). Although this work promised to outline the principles guiding Fichte's reception of Kant, Fichte broke off his work after composing the first three letters, before actually arriving at his proper topic. The extant sections focus on an aesthetic problem—what types of textual effects justify the characterization of a work as "inspired" (*geistvoll*)?—but they do not broach the properly hermeneutic question of how the spirit of a work relates to its letter.

As a consequence, when Friedrich Schlegel discussed Fichte in his review of the first four volumes of Fichte's and Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal* in

March 1797, he could justly charge that Fichte's claim about the ultimate identity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* with Kant's philosophy still awaited demonstration. Such a demonstration, which would "require an entire work," was indispensable according to Schlegel, lest interpretation according to the spirit should degenerate into an "arbitrary and self-serving" (*gesetzlos und willkürlich*) exercise—which would be, as Schlegel wrote, "no interpretation at all." Hence he urged: "May Mr. F. soon communicate to us at least his theory concerning spirit and letter, which must be essentially connected with that which is most central and most peculiar to his philosophy!"¹⁹ Although Schlegel insisted that the ultimate validity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* should not be thought to depend on its fidelity to Kant, the question clearly mattered to him.²⁰ It mattered because it brought to a head some of the lingering uncertainties about the principles of rigorous interpretive practice. At stake was the task of devising a hermeneutics that would foreclose arbitrary speculation, without reducing the philosophy of the spontaneously active "I" to the sterile fixity of overt textual meaning. But the relationship between Kant and Fichte was, in Schlegel's eyes, a paradigmatic case in another respect as well. The question of the identity or difference of Kantian and Fichtean philosophy could not be sidestepped, as he wrote, until "a philosophical history of philosophy is not just possible but at least the laws of a historical critique for its purposes are actually developed."²¹

As for the specific question of Fichte's declarations of loyalty, Schlegel appears skeptical. For, he suggests, even if we admitted that Kant's project was actually accomplished in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, this does not mean that the two are identical in substance. After all, he reasons, those versed in the latest philosophical developments now understand not only Kant but also Spinoza and Leibniz better than each of them understood himself, and yet no one would equate the system permitting such better understanding with that of either Spinoza or Leibniz. Asserting the identity of Fichte's and Kant's philosophies would be justified, as Schlegel goes on to argue, only if Kant had not merely shown Fichte the path to the final answers but also formulated the very same answers as Fichte—if, in other words, we could not only understand Kant better than he himself but indeed answer affirmatively the question "whether Kant also understood himself in that particular manner."²²

Schlegel's definitive argument against Fichte's declarations of loyalty already hints at the criteria of the "philosophical history of philosophy" he is gesturing toward. It is based on the insight that the fundamental character of a philosophy is revealed in its form, here called its "method": "If we can infer the character of a philosophy with the greatest certainty from its method especially in those

cases when it is either as peculiar and full of spirit as the Kantian one or when it is in its own way as perfect and as pliant a tool in the master's hands as the Fichtean one: then this indicates a difference not only in the letter but also in the spirit."²³ Notwithstanding the cumbersome formulation, Schlegel's idea is clear enough: the contrast seen between Kant's "genial" manner of doing philosophy and Fichte's controlled, systematic procedure cannot be explained merely in terms of the difference between the first intimation of an insight and its full elaboration. Such a stark contrast betrays a difference in philosophical substance and therefore gives the lie to Fichte's attestations of fidelity to Kant.

Fichte clearly could not afford to leave Schlegel's challenge unanswered. In the next issue of the *Philosophisches Journal* to appear after Schlegel's review, Fichte published his "*Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*" along with a substantial introduction. Fichte reiterated his earlier claims vis-à-vis Kant: to wit, that no one had correctly understood Kant, that the new system used an entirely new and independent form of presentation (*Darstellung*) to elucidate Kant's misunderstood insight, and that this system must be judged on its own right.²⁴ Later in the same year, he published an even weightier second introduction "for readers who already have a philosophical system." At the beginning of the sixth section of this second introduction stands a footnote in which Fichte refers to the review by Schlegel, noting that its "sharp-witted author" (*geistreicher Verfasser*) demanded a demonstration of the identity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* with Kant's philosophy. The ensuing twenty pages of this section are devoted to the task of the demonstration urged by Schlegel. Significantly, Fichte now dismisses as irrelevant the question as to the reasons for Kant's failure to state his insight in a clear manner, that is, whether he simply did not have a sufficiently determinate grasp of his insight to communicate it clearly or deliberately refrained from making it fully explicit.²⁵ In either case, as Fichte argues, Kant came close to realizing the "spirit and the innermost soul" of philosophy, which is also the spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: the turn away from external objects toward the "I" as the very ground of objectivity. And Fichte added in a footnote: "When one is unable to make satisfactory progress in one's interpretation by appealing to the letter, then one certainly has to interpret in accordance with the spirit."²⁶

Fichte claims that the explicit idealism of the *Wissenschaftslehre* would not appear irreconcilable with Kant's transcendental philosophy if the latter had not been misconstrued by dogmatists.²⁷ Dogmatists misunderstood Kant on two closely related points. First, they falsely assumed that the realism reflected in the positing of the thing in itself could be plainly identified with the standpoint of

philosophy as envisioned by Kant. By contrast, Fichte thinks that Kant meant to restrict such realism to “the standpoint of life” and relativized the thing in itself to something posited by thought, a product of the subject’s self-limiting activity.²⁸ Second, dogmatists were misled by Kant’s official doctrine, which seemed to exclude intellectual intuition from the realm of finite human knowledge, and consequently failed to recognize that Kant’s concept of apperceptive self-consciousness actually amounted to an affirmation of the reality of intellectual intuition. It is only because of this error that Fichte’s affirmation of intellectual intuition struck dogmatist Kantians as a flagrant violation of Kant’s critical strictures. Fichte’s rebuttal of this charge turns on the claim that Kant used an extremely strong, metaphysical notion of intellectual intuition as a foil against which he defined his own critical stance. Given a less metaphysically loaded understanding of that notion, Fichte thinks that it actually captures what Kant’s apperception principle must refer to, at least if the latter is to fulfill its foundational function. The affirmation of intellectual intuition in the *Wissenschaftslehre* is thus merely supposed to make explicit through systematic presentation what Kant had already “thought” but only expressed in a vague and fragmentary manner. Fichte seeks to anchor his bold construal in what are perhaps the central obscurities of the Kantian account: Kant’s failure to clarify the relation within apperceptive consciousness between the thought “I” and the being of the “I”;²⁹ the fact, left unexplained by Kant, that self-consciousness in the context of agency is a determinate awareness of what Kant calls the “fact of reason,” that is, of our being subject to the moral law;³⁰ the absurdity, already noted by Jacobi, that would result from the view that appearances are caused by a thing in itself that stands outside of causal relations;³¹ and the ultimate dependence of the receptivity of intuitions upon the spontaneity of thought according to the Transcendental Deduction, which ultimately entails the dependence of objective representation upon self-consciousness.³²

The details of Fichte’s argument matter here less than the constructive license to which he lays claim in interpreting Kant. Fichte suggests that he himself had not reached a clear understanding of Kant until he embarked on the constructive interpretation that resulted in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The status of this interpretation is, however, anything but clear. On the one hand, Fichte claims that if the *Wissenschaftslehre* were proven to be based on a misunderstanding of Kant, it would still have to be considered a valid philosophical statement in its own right as long as it is not shown to be internally inconsistent. He emphatically denies that he is merely seeking to lend credence to his position by appealing to the authority of Kant.³³ “Faith in oneself” and in one’s own ratio-

nality must take precedence, he suggests, over the question of fidelity to some antecedently defined orthodoxy.

On the other hand, in many remarks Fichte seems intent on dispelling the semblance of independent merit and assures readers that he is merely offering an interpretation of Kant. His proud declarations of *Selbstdenken* notwithstanding, Fichte musters considerable conceptual resources to prove his fidelity to Kant's philosophy and seems eager to prove that even his revisionary practice can be justified in terms of a hermeneutic principle endorsed by Kant himself.³⁴ In a long footnote in the *Versuch*, Fichte refers to two passages by Kant that justify interpretation in terms of the spirit of a work.³⁵ In the first passage, which can be found on the last page of the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that the appearance of inconsistencies between statements taken out of context disappears as soon as the reader masters the "idea of the whole" (*die Idee im Ganzen*). The second passage is from Kant's reply to Eberhard, in which Kant dismisses literal-minded interpretations of Leibniz and asserts that Leibniz must be construed in such a way as to render his system internally consistent. Given the care with which Fichte adduces textual evidence in support of his procedure, it is worth noting that he does *not* cite the passage from the first *Critique* on understanding an author better than he himself, even though it anticipates Fichte's procedure in more programmatic and conclusive terms than the passages that he does choose to cite. It is not hard to guess the reason for this omission. To justify revisionist interpretation, the omitted passage lays emphasis on the precursor's shortcomings—his misconstrual of his own conception—rather than on the successor's indebtedness to him. Invoking these passages would have implied condescension to Kant, which Fichte understandably took great care to avoid.

The same consideration might explain Fichte's reaction to Friedrich Karl Forberg's suggestion in a review to the effect that Kant was said to harbor animadversions toward the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In response to this rumor, Fichte hastens to concede that undoubtedly Kant understands himself best. Instead of admitting that his own position deviates from Kant's, Fichte launches into conjecture. Surely, he writes, Kant must have been influenced by others in repudiating Fichte, and surely it would be presumptuous on Fichte's part to imagine that "this venerable elder" should bother to think through a train of thought that is so obviously foreign to his own manner of presentation and, by extension, to his way of doing philosophy.³⁶ The tortuousness of this line of defense is evident. In order to hold on to his claim that his project is Kantian at least in substance, Fichte must assert the difference of his way of doing philosophy

from Kant's. In effect, Fichte invokes his deviation from the spirit of Kant's philosophy to maintain his fidelity to its letter—whose importance he himself has repeatedly denied.

ORIGINALITY DISOWNED

It would be difficult to overlook the irony of the situation in which Fichte found himself. One might conjecture—as many of Fichte's contemporaries probably did—that this self-declared rescuer of the Kantian spirit could have never described his works as mere explications, or even immanent critiques, of Kant had he fully grasped his own conception. If Fichte thought that he could maintain both his own revisionist interpretation of Kant and his belief that Kant understood himself best, this merely indicated that it was Fichte who in a certain sense did not fully understand what he was up to. After all, he radicalized the very same concern with an ultimate principle that had already defied Kant's capacity to maintain control over his thinking and its presentation. Indeed, the numerous revisions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* document Fichte's ten-year-long effort to come to grips with his own seminal idea. In view of this tremendous exertion it is perhaps not far-fetched to hear a compensatory note, and even an undertone of self-doubt, in Fichte's apodictic assertion of sovereign mastery over his intentions: "no one else can know better than I myself what it is I want to accomplish."³⁷ Hindsight suggests, in any event, that nothing could have more effectively disproved Fichte's confidence in his self-understanding than his repeated claim to be offering merely a reformulation of Kantian philosophy.

How this inadequate self-understanding eventually broke down can be seen from two letters by Schelling, one from 1795, the other from 1799. The earlier letter, which reports to Hegel on Fichte's recent visit to the Tübingen Stift, confirms that Fichte relied on the same paradigm of hermeneutic midwifery that had likely guided Kant when he first declared the principle of better understanding in the context of his invocation of Plato: "Fichte, on the last occasion he was here, said that one would have to possess the genius of a Socrates to penetrate Kant's meaning. With every day that passes I find this truer."³⁸ If, a few years earlier, F. H. Jacobi had the generosity to wonder whether perhaps Fichte and Schelling had understood him better than he himself, Kant for his part expressed his hostility to Fichte's constructive reading in no uncertain terms.³⁹ In an open letter written in 1799, Kant repudiated Fichte. The young Schelling reacted to this turn of events in a way that effectively underlines the significance of Kant's rejection for his more radical followers. In a supportive letter to Fichte, Schelling

acerbically remarked that, given Kant's petty protestations against Fichte's valiant attempt at salvaging the Kantian spirit, Kant was no longer entitled to such hermeneutic generosity. "Although he may continue to drag the dead plaster imprints of his critique behind himself," as Schelling scornfully wrote, "he no longer deserves to be interpreted in such a transcendental manner as if he had unconsciously said something that, as we all knew very well, he never actually said, nor was capable of saying, in a conscious fashion."⁴⁰ Schelling's wording implies that the Kantian critique has proven to be so obviously moribund that this "dead plaster imprint" cannot any longer be seen as a portrayal, however inadequate, of the living spirit captured by Fichte. If, however, Kant no longer deserves the charitable imputation of unwitting insight, then it would seem to follow that the reading originally developed on the basis of such an imputation must be elevated from the relatively modest status of an interpretation and recognized as a philosophical system in its own right. Called into question by Kant himself, Fichte's conviction that he was merely better understanding Kant could hardly be maintained.

As previously noted, Kant argued that theoretical innovators (*Urheber*) frequently misconstrue their own idea in elaborating it and hence successors must pay more attention to that idea itself than to its actual elaboration by the original author. Because Fichte refuses to declare openly that he understands Kant better than he himself, and he insists that Kant must have understood himself along the same lines as Fichte now construes him, Fichte is also led to contradict Kant's claim that the original statement of a given theoretical innovation is often inadequate. In other words, he must repudiate the very argument that could serve as a Kantian justification of his revision of Kant. The departure is rendered all the clearer by the fact that Fichte continues to have recourse to such Kantian terms as *originator* (*Urheber*) and *successor* (*Nachfolger*), and the opposition between parts of a text and its totality.

Fichte's relevant line of thought is occasioned by a rhetorical question: why exclude the possibility that Kant himself construed his system in the same narrow fashion as his deluded dogmatic successors? This possibility can be ruled out, replies Fichte, because the original innovator enjoys a certain hermeneutic advantage that makes him immune to the typical mistakes of successors: "The originator of a system occupies a different situation from that of his interpreters and followers. The very same thing that would not count as evidence of an absolute lack of reason and common sense among the latter would indeed constitute such evidence in the former case."⁴¹ As Fichte goes on to explain, the innovator is guided by an idea of the whole. That idea of the whole can only

arise through the synthetic production of something thus far nonexistent. Later interpreters, however, must reconstruct that idea through piecemeal analysis of the innovator's original statement. Such analysis must take place over time, through successive reconstruction of the whole. In trying to make sense of any given part of the original statement, the successor is initially in no position to draw on the total conception, since the latter only becomes available at the end of painstaking study of the parts. As a consequence, the analytical reconstruction elaborated by a successor is always more prone to internal inconsistencies than the innovator's synthetic conception.

What Fichte describes here is, of course, a variant of the hermeneutic circle—but, in my view, an ultimately implausible one. The only reason why Fichte can claim that the hermeneutic circle makes successor interpretations prone to internal contradiction is that he fails to acknowledge that the circles in which interpretation moves keep widening over the temporal progression of reading; these circles encompass an increasingly comprehensive meaning as interpretation covers an ever larger and ever more integrated portion of the text. If the hermeneutic circle poses any danger at all, it is not the danger of internal contradiction but error in the initial projection of meaning, that is, in what Heidegger and Gadamer would describe as the anticipative grasp (*Vorgriff*) that guides comprehension. Such errors—failures of correspondence rather than coherence—typically occur when the successor does not share with the innovator an orientation toward the subject matter that would ensure convergence with the innovator's idea. The fault for such lack of prior attunement is, however, just as likely to lie with the innovator than with the successor. In other words, it could be that the innovator's original idea is, while internally consistent, nonetheless wrong from the successor's point of view.

Moreover, even if we grant Fichte's questionable claim that the holistic character of an innovative conception makes it immune to inconsistencies, this does not mean that the development of this conception by the innovator cannot be riddled with incongruities, self-contradictions, and non sequiturs. If Fichte is right that the successive character of reading necessitates a circular movement that is in principle interminable, much the same applies to writing. Fichte himself recognizes in passing that, even though the innovator takes his starting point from "an idea of the whole, in which all the parts are united," nonetheless "he presents these parts individually [*einzel*], because it is only through the parts that he is able to communicate the whole."¹² To complete this line of thought, however, Fichte would need to engage in a more nuanced reflection on the pitfalls of linguistic composition. Only in the rarest of cases is the written

text a fully transparent means of communicating preconceived thoughts; and more often than not, writing allows the unintended connotations and implications of words and phrases to interfere with the author's thinking, as a result of which the partial articulations reached at any given point in the process of writing can overshadow and distort the original conception. Incongruities may arise whenever there is a tension between the altered understanding suggested by already achieved partial formulations and the continued hold of the original idea over the author's mind.

To conclude, the argument contrived by Fichte in support of his thesis about the hermeneutic advantage of the originator is ultimately unconvincing. A more plausible view is expressed in the Kantian claim to which Fichte is probably responding: the claim, that is, that the initial statement of an original idea tends to be flawed and hence a more internally consistent construal of that idea can be achieved in interpretations by successors. Somewhat ironically, then, it was Kant, rather than Fichte, who gave the clearest expression to the ground of Fichte's entitlement to the claim to have understood Kant better than Kant understood himself. Fichte's revisionist interpretation of Kant is undoubtedly based on this insight into the progressive, constructive character of interpretation, even though obligatory humility led him to disown this insight and insist on the primacy of the innovator's own understanding of the matter. Tellingly, it was only well after his Jena phase and two years after the death of his authoritative precursor that Fichte would own up to the constructive thrust of interpretation according to the spirit. In his 1806 lectures on *Characteristics of the Present Age* he wrote: "We have to tell the author precisely what he does not say, that which however enables all utterances of his [*wodurch er aber zu allem seinem Sagen kommt*]; we must uncover that which an author himself *is* in his innermost being, perhaps hidden to his own eyes,—we must extract the spirit from his letter."⁴³ In his later work, however, Fichte's reflections are already embedded in a philosophy of history that mandates a use of the term *Geist* not unlike the one we find in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, completed in the same year. Accordingly, Fichte goes on to suggest that an author's innermost spirit may coincide with the spirit of the times.

Scholars of German idealism will no doubt continue to debate the extent to which the post-Kantians remained faithful to their central source of philosophical inspiration. Indeed this question bears on the interpretation of these authors, as well as, indirectly, on the assessment of their contemporary relevance. It has not been my goal in this chapter to advance any substantive thesis in this regard. What I hope to have shown is merely that the hermeneutic

tenets that Fichte and the other post-Kantians invoked to clarify their relationship to Kant are continuous with the way Kant himself had characterized the relationship of philosophical thought to its history. The terms of the disputes surrounding Kant's legacy can thus be traced back to Kant's own reflections on interpretation. It is precisely for this reason, however, that Fichte's response to Kant gave rise to a radically new way of thinking about philosophical communication. Because Kant remained an authoritative point of reference for Fichte, and because his stance toward the Kantian corpus was fraught with a profound tension between fidelity and departure, a great deal was at stake for Fichte when he reflected on the role of writing in transmitting philosophical insight. Characterized by a striking sense of urgency, these reflections result—as I will show in the following chapter—in a highly consequential, and at the same time problematic, conception of philosophical writing.

3

ESOTERIC ENLIGHTENMENT IN FICHTE

CHOOSING TO BE FREE

One of the abiding perplexities of the Enlightenment is summed up in Rousseau's observation in *The Social Contract*: "In their chains slaves lose everything, even the desire to escape. They love their servitude the way the companions of Ulysses loved their degradation."¹ Rousseau's primary concern in this passage is with man's bondage to other human beings in a Hobbesian society whose members have yet to enter a social contract. Yet the allusion to the Homeric story of sensuous enchantment is not fortuitous. Rousseau goes on to link "civil liberty" to "moral liberty." Upon inauguration of the social contract, the deterministic operation of appetites and instincts gives way to rational agency governed by "obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself."² We may thus infer that the point about humans' voluntary acceptance of unfreedom in the political context applies with equal force to unfreedom in the moral-psychological sense.

Rousseau's claim that humans cling to servitude implies more than a mere lack of resistance. It suggests that some individuals are captive to a false self-conception, misconstruing themselves as beings in the inescapable grip of natural and historical forces. In Rousseau's view, then, it is never just fate or bad luck that consigns some of us to compulsion by the irrational promptings of nature and history. In every such case we allow ourselves to be thus constrained by adopting self-conceptions entailing false beliefs about our place in the world.

The centrality of this insight to modernity, and more specifically to German idealism, should be abundantly clear from Kant's famous reference to the "self-incurred immaturity" that humans must leave behind if they are to become enlightened.³

Rousseau's thinking about this matter also suggests that there is little to no room for guidance by another person in this respect. In *Émile*, Rousseau rehearses a variant of the circularity problem that vitiates so many pedagogical models, from Plato's *Republic* to Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. As Rousseau points out, teachers who use reasoning to instill rationality in their pupils in the first place are caught in a vicious circle.⁴ Given that Rousseau equates freedom with rationality, he is led to conclude that adoption of the view of oneself as determined by natural promptings makes one utterly impervious to rational arguments. The very idea of enlightenment thus provokes the question of whether there are insurmountable limits to the expansion of the sphere of autonomy and, if the answer is in the affirmative, how such limits might affect the nexus of ethics, politics, and culture. Rousseau's answer to this question is well known and notoriously unsettling. If citizens allow themselves to be carried away by private inclinations they must be "forced to be free" through coercive imposition of the *volonté générale*.⁵

Even if one stops short of this drastic political solution, the impossibility of a purely rational propaedeutic to rationality would still seem to suggest that the advocates of the Enlightenment cannot fully relinquish coercion, be it of the physical or the rhetorical kind.⁶ Hamann, one of the earliest critics of the Enlightenment, alludes to this circumstance when he lambasts Kant's readiness to accept the support of an absolutist monarch to lead citizens out of their self-incurred tutelage. For, asks Hamann, who is actually the unnamed "other" figuring in Kant's essay, whose meekly accepted guidance is said by Kant to leave us in a state of immaturity? "Answer: the tiresome custodian who must be implicitly understood as the correlate of the immature person."⁷ This custodian is none other, Hamann suggests, than the philosopher whose emancipatory pedagogy must be backed by the goodwill of an enlightened absolutist monarch and the rifles of "a well-disciplined, numerous army safeguarding his infallibility and orthodoxy." Unable to raise humankind to enlightened maturity without coercion through the sovereign, the philosophical teacher ends up reducing members of his audience to children who need to be taught about their higher vocation.

If Hamann is right about the infantilizing effect of Enlightenment pedagogy, then the resentful retort of Rameau's nephew in Diderot's dialogue captures

rather accurately how the philosopher's audience might react to his rigorous demonstrations of man's true nature: "Oh, you philosophers, there you go again! If something we say is to the point, it's by fluke, because we're maniacs, or mystics. You and your friends are the only ones who understand themselves [*qui vous entendiez*]. Yes, Master Philosopher, I understand myself, and I understand myself just as well as you do yourself [*je m'entends aussi bien que vous vous entendez*]."⁸ The nephew's outburst underscores the way in which the Enlightenment agenda complicates the status of self-understanding in all its forms, rendering problematic not just the meaning of our own words but our very sense of who we are. When considered in conjunction with Rousseau's and Hamann's statements, the nephew's protestations raise a host of larger questions. Can a theoretically framed interpretation of our lives establish truths about ourselves that are not immediately accessible from within our ordinary sense-making practices? And can the philosopher who lays claim to such knowledge help others reclaim their surrendered freedom, so that they might finally dare to think for themselves? A viable construal of the Enlightenment project must suggest answers to these questions that are more promising than the options envisioned by Diderot, Rousseau, and Hamann.

The post-Kantian idealists' approaches to the problem of enlightenment pedagogy reflect a keen awareness of the universal human tendency to repudiate freedom. Kant's critique gives this problematic a new inflection. The question of intelligibility becomes integral to philosophy's reflection on its basic possibilities and limits, requiring a degree of authorial self-awareness rarely encountered previously. As speculation reaches vertiginous heights, constantly straining the "bounds of sense" (to quote the title of P. F. Strawson's influential book on Kant) in its effort to clarify the grounds of sense, neither the genesis nor the transmission of philosophical insight can be taken for granted any longer as psychological contingencies outside the scope of philosophy proper.

The terms in which such questions arise in post-Kantian idealism are defined by a fundamental dualisms inherited from Kant, which his successors struggle to overcome. The very method of transcendental-philosophical inquiry is premised on a distinction between two aspects of the philosophizing "I." On the one hand, there is the philosopher's empirical person, characterized by states of mind and psychological attributes available to introspective knowledge. On the other hand, the investigation focuses on the transcendental subject, the "I" of apperceptive self-consciousness whose constituting activity grounds the condition of possibility of all experience, including introspective awareness. Although in apperceptive self-consciousness I am aware of something nonphenomenal,

namely, my own mental activity, this awareness is not a piece of knowledge about myself but a formal condition of all knowledge and as such devoid of content. The “I” designated in the “I think” is therefore not an object of possible experience. Inner sense, by contrast, does provide determinate knowledge of the mind, but only of its constituted, phenomenal aspect, that is, its temporal states. The demarcation between the two aspects has the crucial metatheoretical consequence that the philosophy of the subject cannot rely on the modes of introspective observation native to empirical psychology. Yet neither is it possible to establish a metaphysical doctrine of the subject (what Kant calls a “rational psychology”) through explication of the thought “I think,” since that thought is purely formal and empty.

How knowledge claims about the conditions of the possibility of knowledge can be justified—without relapsing into psychologism or metaphysical speculation—thus became a troubling question for proponents of transcendental philosophy.⁹ It is not clear, in other words, what sort of warrant might entitle the philosopher to claims about the necessary forms of mental activity shared by all human subjects. A certain room thus opens up for the skeptical worry that philosophical thought is forever mired in idiosyncrasies of the thinker’s mental life and unable to achieve universality in any strict sense.¹⁰ In the wake of Kant’s critique this issue became acutely pressing, and the critical edifice contained no obvious solution to it. This was the lacuna highlighted by G. E. Schulze’s influential metacritical objections in *Aenesidemus* (1792), the response to which given by the young Fichte ushered in the boldly speculative phase of idealism.

The problem would persist, however, in spite of massive shifts in the philosophical landscape. Around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries it was the same need to steer clear of psychologism, on the one hand, and metaphysical speculation, on the other, that drove the far-reaching theoretical innovations of Gottlob Frege and Edmund Husserl. It is, in fact, instructive to turn, however briefly, to Husserl’s later reflections on the threat to intelligibility posed by Kant’s separation of transcendental reflection from the self-experience of concrete subjects. In an important chapter of his late work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), Husserl draws attention to this consequence of Kant’s failure to clarify the “conjunction [*Verschwisterung*] of difference and identity” in the relation between transcendental subjectivity and empirical selfhood. By excluding the transcendental subject from the plane of conscious self-experience, Kant deprives his readers of the means by which they might translate his account into “intuitively graspable concepts” accessible to “common sense.” According to Husserl, the re-

sultant failure to achieve perspicuity leaves Kant stranded in a kind of “mythic concept formation.”¹¹

With Fichte’s radicalization of Kantian idealism, the Kantian separation between the transcendental and the psychological, between the subject’s original constituting activity and its constituted, worldly self-experience, threatens to assume the form of a near-schizophrenic split between the philosophical conception of the mind and our everyday self-understanding. The reason for this is that the view emerging from Fichte’s recasting of Kant stands in complete contradiction to the ordinary picture of the mind’s relation to the world. Whereas in the ordinary view objective reality exists independently of the conditions of its being known and the mind is heteronomously determined by it, in the Fichtean idealist conception the existence of objects is ultimately a function of the mind’s self-determining activity. The disagreement between the two views is too fundamental to be settled by argument, for it concerns the question of what counts as a ground for holding a belief in the first place. Consequently, the Fichtean idealist cannot hope to marshal arguments in favor of his position that could convince the defender of the ordinary standpoint. Untethered from everyday experience, transcendental reflection runs the risk of becoming esoteric, elitist, irrelevant, and—the most pervasive worry—unintelligible not just to others but even to its practitioners. It is this troubling split identified by Husserl, between the transcendental idealist view and the dogmatic realism of natural consciousness, that gives rise to Fichte’s, Schelling’s, and Hegel’s often tortuous metatheoretical reflections on the relation between philosophical insight and everyday life, with momentous implications for the philosopher’s stance vis-à-vis his audience.

What renders this disjunction between everyday self-understanding and philosophical theory particularly consequential is the element of moral choice it involves. To appreciate this dimension of the problem we must return to its Kantian source. It is well known that Kant’s critique of rational psychology is not meant as a concession to skepticism about the ultimate metaphysical character of the subject *qua* agent. On the contrary, the demonstration that we cannot obtain theoretical knowledge of the noumenal subject enables Kant to fend off deterministic arguments against the freedom of the will, arguments that threaten to render counterfactual moral requirements meaningless. Kant concedes that, considered as observable events, our actions are inextricable from the chain of temporal causes; they follow in a necessary manner from our psychological character, which in turn is determined by causes that are not within our power. However, he claims that the impossibility of theoretical knowledge

concerning the underlying metaphysical or “intelligible” character of the self (what it is “in itself” or “noumenally”) frees us to make an assertion about the self that we could never make if we considered it merely in an empirical respect. Because the limitations of our theoretical knowledge preclude the possibility of a theoretical refutation of freedom, in the context of our practical agency we are free to consider the self as an efficient force exempt from causality, that is, as an uncaused, or “spontaneous,” ground of changes in the empirical world. Noumenal ignorance guarantees that no item of experientially based knowledge can disprove this practical conception of ourselves as free agents, while also relieving us of the obligation to specify how spontaneous causation might actually operate within the deterministic realm of experience.

Kant thus does not claim to have given a theoretical demonstration of freedom. His point is that, if the metaphysical ground of agency lies in a dimension inaccessible to experience, then philosophical reflection is free to determine that ground on the basis of moral considerations independent of experience. This line of thought, however, invites a weighty retort. The same point about the epistemological elusiveness of my ultimate nature also allows me, it would seem, to regard myself as causally determined, in the grip of natural promptings and acquired propensities that are beyond my control. Even if I act “as if” I were free, the experience of having acted against sensuous inclinations can give only an all-too fallible psychological sense but no definitive confirmation of my freedom. And since there can be no incontrovertible evidence for the correctness or falsity of either conception of myself, I am free to decide whether or not I shall take myself to be free.

It might appear, then, as though Kant anticipated the Nietzschean transformation of philosophy into free interpretation.¹² Before rushing to this radical conclusion, however, it is worth noting a powerful consideration in favor of endorsing, among all the possible interpretations of human nature, the one advanced by Kant. For that interpretation is arguably the only one that can account for the freedom exercised in the very activity of philosophical reflection. While Kant does not explicitly invoke this argument, a charitable reading must reckon with it as an important background consideration in favor of the conception of spontaneity at the heart of the Kantian project and its successors. For Kant, however, it is another consideration that ultimately decides the debate between freedom and determinism. The idea of a causally undetermined but causally efficient will is not merely permissible from an epistemological point of view. It is, rather, the sole rational starting point for elaborating a self-conception compatible with our inexpugnable awareness of the moral law. Indeed,

in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant claims to deduce from our moral self-awareness not just the necessity of holding ourselves to be free but the actuality of freedom.

Freedom, morality, and rationality are inextricably bound up with one another in Kant's account. The validity of the moral law presupposes the amenability of the will to rational legislation, which in turn presupposes its power to resist inclination, that is, its transcendental freedom. Conversely, Kant argues that morality is the only consistent way to actualize the freedom of the will. For, if the freedom of my will is not to be construed as mere arbitrariness, such freedom must mean more than just an absence of external necessitation; it must also involve the power to give one's agency a law. The only law that does not infringe upon the will's freedom from external necessitation is the purely formal imperative to act in such a way that the maxim of one's action conforms to reason's principle of non-contradiction. According to Kant's explication, a rationally self-legislating will must endorse only those maxims of action whose hypothetical generalization to universal laws does not entail self-contradiction. This line of thought furnishes Kant with the most fundamental formulation of the moral law.

The interdependence between morality and freedom is rendered even tighter by Kant's hard-won insight that freedom does not admit of theoretical demonstration.¹³ It is, rather, only in our moral self-awareness that our freedom is disclosed. That inexpugnable sense of normative pressure, which is customarily called the voice of conscience—Kant calls it “the fact of reason” (*Faktum der Vernunft*)—signals a transcendent claim immanent to consciousness. It reminds me that, even though my empirical-psychological being is subject to causal laws, I nevertheless remain answerable to an order legislated by pure reason. This voice does not compel; rather, it enjoins me to do one thing and not another, and while I cannot escape it, I nevertheless remain free to acknowledge or deny its claim upon me. Specifically, it enjoins me to determine my will freely, that is, not in terms of any particular law rooted in psychological contingencies but in conformity with the pure form of lawfulness. Since agency always involves the possibility of self-reflection on the part of the agent, the fact of reason can also be translated as the demand that I regard my will as causally undetermined but causally effective—even though the demand-character of the fact of reason entails that I remain free to view myself as just another link in the chain of natural causes. In other words, the fact of reason commands me to think that, even when antecedent causes produce in me a powerful urge to act in a certain way, that sense of compulsion appears irresistible only to the extent that I have,

in the face of reason's demand, freely *chosen* to let myself be swayed by such causes.

Inferred from the fact of reason, Kant's conception of freedom is, in the words of Dieter Henrich, "not a theoretical conclusion but the self-explication of moral insight."¹⁴ Kant's thinking about the connection between freedom and morality comes to a head in his key distinction between *ratio essendi* (ground of being) and *ratio cognoscendi* (ground of knowledge).¹⁵ Although, as Kant writes, freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the latter is the *ratio cognoscendi* of the former. Given this circularity, it might appear as though all we could infer from our moral self-awareness was that we must consider ourselves to be free, leaving the question open whether we are actually free and capable of acting morally. However, as Paul Franks has argued, the circularity posited by Kant becomes productive, rather than vicious, by virtue of the asymmetry between its two poles.¹⁶ Franks's subtle interpretation hinges on a construal of the "fact of reason" as a free act (*Faktum* being derived from *facere*, Latin for doing) rather than an inert fact—not a *Tatsache* (a relatively new and unstable term at the end of the eighteenth century) but what Fichte will call *Tathandlung* (an older term). In Franks's interpretation, it is precisely to solicit this act that Kant invokes hypothetical examples featuring a difficult choice between autonomy and heteronomy. When I ponder such examples in light of my moral awareness, the active fact of reason generates a feeling of "respect" (*Achtung*) for the moral law that enables the latter to become an efficacious motive of action outweighing all inclinations. I thereby do not merely assent to the rational inference that I must think of myself as free. Rather, transforming myself through my reflection, I actively constitute the actuality of my freedom. Hence the outcome of moral reflection is not just the postulation of freedom but also certain knowledge of myself as actually free.

Because this knowledge is essentially tied to the first-person perspective, rooted as it is in reflection on what I should do, it categorically differs from the sort of theoretical knowledge that finds expression in judgments operating with universal concepts. Access to such practical knowledge is not guaranteed by the possession of rational capacities alone. Each individual is free to achieve such knowledge by actualizing his freedom through the sort of reflection described by Kant—or not to do so. If each of us is free to determine his will in a way that preserves and actualizes his freedom, then each of us is also free to adopt maxims based on inclination that infringe upon that freedom. If, in reflecting on an exemplary case, someone freely determines his will in the latter fashion, then his reflection will fail to produce a feeling of respect for the moral law. Conse-

quently, such a reflection will constitute and reveal its subject as unfree. This choice between autonomy and heteronomy is a practical one, and it imposes itself upon the philosopher with the same inevitability as it does upon ordinary agents. From this perspective, Kant's injunction to maturity and independent thought (*Selbstdenken*) can be understood as a call to actualize our transcendental freedom.

The interpretation developed by Franks sheds light on the problem of enlightenment pedagogy in the post-Kantian context in two important respects. First, Franks's account of Kant's practical deduction of freedom identifies a model of demonstration whose applicability Kant's followers will no longer confine to the practical sphere but extend to the pursuit of theoretical insight.¹⁷ Second, by drawing attention to the first-person character of Kant's deduction of freedom, Franks pinpoints a key reason for the combination of universalism and esotericism that characterizes most variants of idealism developed between Kant and Hegel. Although Kant claims that every human being is capable of reaching practical insight into the actuality of freedom, his argument also suggests that those who fail to actualize their freedom in a positive manner will be bound to find his deduction obscure or downright unintelligible. This threat of unintelligibility is an endemic feature of post-Kantian idealism that can be traced back to Kant's conception.

THE FICHTEAN EXPERIMENT

Before examining how this problematic inflects Fichte's authorial stance, it is worth recalling the broader cultural context in which Fichte undertook to recast Kantian transcendental philosophy. For the radical character of Fichte's project and his well-known cantankerousness are not enough to explain his notoriously vexed attitude toward his audience. Ongoing cultural transformations in the German-speaking lands also conspired to complicate the situation of contemporary philosophers inspired by Kant. Enlightenment intellectuals from Kant's generation could still place their hopes in the rational, free judgment of a reading public dedicated to earnest inquiry. As society became increasingly differentiated, however, and the print market underwent exponential growth in the 1780s, it became increasingly difficult for writers to take their bearings from any straightforward idea of a homogenous reading public.¹⁸

In societal practice as well as in critical reflection upon it, two markedly different modes of reading began to consolidate themselves. The emergence of a bourgeois leisure class resulted in the spread of a commodified type of read-

ing whose main purpose was diversion. It gave rise to a demand that writers sought to satisfy and reproduce by churning out gothic fictions and sentimental novels, works teeming with robbers, ghosts, secret societies, and mystical doctrines. The term *romantisch* was initially used to describe precisely this type of literature, intended for voracious consumption.¹⁹ Concerned commentators described this mode of reading as escapist, omnivorous, and superficially receptive. Some reactionary critics responded to its spread with alarmed calls on the authorities to “police reading,” to use Martha Woodmansee’s term.

However, there were also a number of progressive-minded writers too who expressed unease about the “reading epidemic” (*Leseseuche*) that swept through the German-speaking lands. Writers such as Fichte and Schiller had to come to terms with the fact that an increasing number of readers apparently preferred the cheap thrills offered by pulp novels to the strains of independent thought, a perception that could not but complicate their aspiration to promote the cause of intellectual autonomy. As Woodmansee has shown, these writers typically sought to correct putative aberrations of the reading market by changing not the supply but the demand.²⁰ They advocated an art of reading that was to be intensive rather than extensive, active rather than receptive, contemplative rather than distracted, and whose goal was to exercise, discipline, and refine the faculties rather than indulge them. This ideal of reading had an obvious affinity with the reading practices cultivated in Pietism. It received further theoretical legitimation through the Kantian demarcation of judgments of beauty registering a spontaneous response to formal features of the object from “impure” judgments of “agreeableness” triggered by material features.

It is easy to see why this concern should have been raised to the highest pitch by the extraordinary demands placed on audiences by transcendental philosophy, and especially by its Fichtean variant. Throughout the restless trajectory of Fichte’s career, questions pertaining to the communication and comprehension of philosophical insight remained central to his work. Indeed the urge to make himself understood was a key motive driving Fichte’s prolific authorship. Faced with persistent incomprehension and misunderstanding from the 1794 publication of the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* onward, Fichte tirelessly produced one new presentation of his *Wissenschaftslehre* after another. What remained constant throughout these reformulations was Fichte’s intense authorial self-awareness and his concern with the difficulty of communicating his foundational insight.

Fichte’s most far-reaching reflections on this problematic can be found in his so-called second *Wissenschaftslehre*, as outlined in the incomplete *Attempt at*

a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre and its two substantial introductions. Whereas the 1794 formulations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* followed a fairly rigid method of exposition, in the new version Fichte attempts to recast his doctrine in the form of an “experiment.”²¹ The aim of that experiment is to reconstruct the basic logical structure to which the interconnectedness and hence the necessity of our mental acts are due. In this way Fichte endeavors to deduce the necessity of our objective representations from the logical conditions of possibility of self-conscious subjectivity. To specify the sense in which this project is experimental, we must first of all note that Fichte’s method for elucidating the structure of subjectivity already presupposes a certain conception of the subject. In this view the subject is not a substance, a representing thing, but a “pure activity” that has no reality apart from its awareness of itself. In a decisive adoption and reinterpretation of a Kantian term, Fichte calls this act an “intellectual intuition.” The term stands for an elementary self-acquaintance in which mental activity coincides immediately with nonobservational awareness of that activity, precluding any distinction between actuality and thinking, intuited content and conceptual form.²² Whereas for Kant intellectual intuition was merely a limiting concept, designating a hypothetical creative intellect over and against which the finitude of human representation could be brought into sharper relief, Fichte argues that it is only through such immediate acquaintance with my own activity that I am aware of myself as a subject distinct from objects. Without intellectual intuition so understood “I cannot take a step, move hand or foot,” for such self-awareness is precisely what distinguishes acts from mere events.²³

When applied to the philosopher, this notion of the subject has momentous implications for the method of Fichte’s experiment. Although the mental acts described by Fichte are said to obtain even in ordinary experience that lacks theoretical reflection, they have to be actively performed in the course of philosophical reflection.²⁴ Since, according to the initial postulate, the subject is not a discoverable entity but something that exists only insofar as it thinks itself, the philosopher’s initial task is the simple one of thinking the thought corresponding to the pronoun *I*. For Fichte this means performing a mental act that “reverts into itself.” Because of the coincidence within intellectual intuition between the act of thought and the determinate intuition of being, the act of thinking “I” is at the same time a determinate representation of this act *qua* absolutely free act, *as distinct* from contingent, externally caused representations. In other words, not only does the “I” exist through its thinking of itself alone but it is also immediately and determinately known in and through its self-actualizing thought.²⁵ One might say that the “I” of the Fichtean philosopher is agency (*praxis*), pro-

duction (*poiesis*), and insight into productive activity (*theoria*) at one and the same time—light source, primary illumination, and secondary reflection in one. Since such transcendental knowledge of the “I” does not require sensible intuition and discursive synthesis in conformity with subjective conditions (as all empirical knowledge does according to Kant), it may be called unconditional.

To be sure, Fichte does not fully repudiate Kant’s claim that apperceptive self-awareness is merely the form of empirical representation. Fichte too insists that my intellectual intuition of myself as an actively self-determining subject of representation is not itself a distinctly conscious representation,²⁶ and that it is always intertwined with my empirical consciousness of the objects that I take to be affecting my senses. Thus already in the first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, published in 1794, Fichte claims that in order to recognize intellectual intuition as the necessary form of all my representational activity, I need to perform an act of “reflective abstraction” from the empirical contents of representation.²⁷ Through this act, I recognize that my intellectually intuited, spontaneously self-determining activity is the sole principle by recourse to which I can explain why certain contents of my consciousness must be referred to objects.²⁸ Only through such an act of reflection do I recognize and realize the immediate knowledge that I always possess, although mostly in a tacit form alone, of this self-determining activity.

It is this presupposition of intellectual intuition that provides the key to Fichte’s solution to the problem of transcendental reflection as it arises in the wake of Kant’s critique. If intellectual intuition did not give us immediate access to our own mental activity, philosophical self-reflection could never reach beyond the sphere of everyday, empirical self-knowledge to grasp the underlying constitutive activity. By relying on intellectual intuition, however, the philosopher can simultaneously perform and comprehend, actively conceive and immediately intuit, the various logically interconnected acts that are necessarily involved in the thought “I.”²⁹ Whereas the Kantian model only allowed for knowledge of the self as a contingent psychological object or a purely formal awareness of the “I” as the transcendental subject, Fichtean intellectual intuition affords determinate knowledge of the subject. Fichte’s second *Wissenschaftslehre* is thus an experiment in the precise sense that it is aimed at retroactively confirming its initial postulate, not unlike an experiment confirms a hypothesis.³⁰ The initial postulate is the primordial, prereflective self-acquaintance grounded in intellectual intuition, which constitutes merely the possibility of self-consciousness.³¹ By taking himself to be intellectually intuiting in this sense, the Fichtean philosopher can develop an elaborate, fully explicit, normatively binding conception of the self-conscious subject.

It should be clear from this characterization of Fichte's experiment that his readers cannot hope to understand the *Wissenschaftslehre* by just passively assenting to its written formulations. Rather, the reader must enact each step along the way and thus construct himself in a way that parallels the author's path of self-construction. To understand the *Wissenschaftslehre* is to be *doing* it. This is why at key junctures Fichte urges his readers: "Think of yourself; construct the concept of yourself and take note of how you do this."³²

Crucially, however, this experiment is not a presuppositionless undertaking. It is expressly described by Fichte as a circular procedure that aims at explicating and validating its initial postulate, the idea of the free, intellectually intuiting "I." Precisely because this first principle is supposed to be an absolute and unconditionally self-validating one, it cannot be deduced from any higher principle. Its validation through the experiment is retroactive and hence cannot be invoked to convince someone who has no grasp of it. Any attempt at acquainting such a reader with the first principle will run into the difficulty that the principle in question cannot become an object of empirical representation, since it constitutes the very ground of possibility of all representation. Moreover, linguistic accounts of the first principle must restrict themselves to various negative, indirect characterizations. They can only gesture toward this elusive ground by resorting to dichotomies and then negating them, describing the first principle as the identity of thought and being, or of subject and object.

Since Fichte's first principle cannot be adequately represented in language, it is not clear how it might serve as the foundation of a self-enclosed system of discursive knowledge. This was precisely the criticism leveled against Fichte by Hölderlin in the fragment "Judgment and Being" (1794) and by Novalis in his *Fichte Studies* (1795–1796).³³ More recently, Stanley Rosen offered the following lapidary diagnosis of the difficulty attendant on Fichte's first principle: "In pure intuition there is no structure to describe or to explain. . . . So-called analyses of activity are in fact analyses of the products of activity. What is required is not logical analysis but experience. Not only is there no deduction of the categories from a single principle; there is no formulable principle." Rosen draws a radical conclusion: "the primacy of spontaneity disconnects absolute activity from the principle of intelligibility."³⁴

Although no amount of logical analysis can substitute for what Rosen calls the experience of intellectual intuition—where the term *experience* must be understood in a qualified sense that has yet to be clarified—Fichte maintains that the requisite experience is at least in principle available to everyone. He explicitly denies that there are innate differences in talent that render some individuals

incapable of thinking the thought “I.” By definition, everyone capable of agency and experience has the power to produce that thought, for a tacit awareness of ourselves as active is indispensable for both experience and agency. Yet, Fichte also emphasizes that intellectual intuition is not a thematic self-consciousness. While everyone possesses a notion of himself, which is at the same time a determinate self-intuition, not everyone knows that he possesses such a notion. The ascent to a conscious recognition of this concept—to a “concept of this concept,” as Fichte puts it—requires a free act of reflection.³⁵

It is this insistence on the centrality of freedom that accounts for the difference of Fichte’s new presentation from the original formulations of 1794. Scholars have repeatedly interpreted this shift as evidence that Fichte became convinced of the primacy of practical over theoretical reason and accordingly undertook to deduce the structure of representation from moral consciousness. As Paul Franks has pointed out, however, this line of interpretation cannot be reconciled with Fichte’s resolute rejection of regressive arguments that start out from ostensible facts of consciousness.³⁶ Instead, Franks convincingly argues that Fichte’s new presentation offers a unified account that *inserts* the practical into the theoretical and thereby uncovers the interdependence of the two dimensions. According to Franks’s interpretation, the relation between the theoretical and the practical in the context of the new presentation is modeled after the virtuous circle at the heart of Kant’s deduction of freedom.³⁷ Although the activity of intellectual intuition is the *ratio essendi* of all determinate consciousness and hence the unconditional first principle of philosophy, nevertheless that first principle has its *ratio cognoscendi* in the philosopher’s awareness of the moral law. Moral awareness is thus not the first principle of philosophy but the subjective precondition for the genesis of philosophical thought, that is, for the act by which the philosopher first resolves to reconstruct experience as grounded in the activity of the intellectually intuiting “I.” Motivated by a moral *ought*, that enterprise begins with the postulation of intellectual intuition as the unconditional first principle of philosophical reflection, and it achieves its aim when that principle is validated retroactively through the demonstration that it can be efficacious in actual experience. Fichte explicitly anchors the genesis of transcendental philosophy in moral self-awareness when he describes transcendental idealism as the only “dutiful way of thinking [*pflichtmäßige Denkart*] in which speculation and morality are intimately united”; by virtue of awareness of the moral law alone, Fichte suggests, everyone is capable of thinking of oneself as a spontaneous subject.³⁸

The *Wissenschaftslehre* originates in the act by which the philosopher takes up this awareness of the moral law and resolves to unfold it into a comprehensive

conception of himself as a free subject. Although this act is radically free in the sense that it is not mandated by any antecedently available principle, it is nevertheless capable of producing its own retroactive validation. According to Fichte, everyone is free to unfold this dim, nascent awareness of himself into the fully reflected and conceptually articulated self-comprehension of a free subject.³⁹ Whether one actually does so, however, depends on the way one realizes this freedom. And freedom, as Kant already understood, is potentially self-negating. The freedom to recognize oneself as self-determining is, by definition, also the freedom to refrain from transcendental reflection and to misconstrue oneself as a passive object enmeshed in the causal nexus of nature. Those who opt for the former view embark on the critical-transcendental path toward the idealism of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which anchors reason (*Vernunft*) in a recognition of the primacy of pure “I-hood” (*Ichheit überhaupt*) over objecthood. Those who opt for the latter view, by contrast, condemn themselves to the dogmatic realism of ordinary consciousness, which teaches that the mind is heteronomously determined by independently existing objects impinging on it. Dogmatists are, from the point of view of Fichtean idealism, hopelessly mistaken about the species of being they are—or, perhaps one should say, about the species of being that they could be. Because they have chosen to regard themselves as belonging to the world of objects, they experience themselves as causally determined beings entrapped by their contingent constitution. Having repudiated their freedom and submitted to causal necessity, they are bound to reject the *Wissenschaftslehre* on the grounds that they find themselves unable to think the intellectually intuiting, freely self-determining “I.” Fichte’s condemnation of such critics of his system carries a strong moral charge:

The reason for this incapacity does not lie in any particular weakness of their intellectual power, but rather in a weakness of their entire character. The final goal of their acting is their own I (in the sense in which they understand this word, i.e., their own individual person), which thus also constitutes the limit of their ability to think clearly. For them, their own individual I is the only true substance, and reason is merely an accident of this substance. Their own person does not present itself to them as a particular expression of reason; instead, reason is present simply in order to assist this person in making his way in the world. . . . Insofar as they alone are concerned, they are quite right to insist upon this incapacity; but they must not pretend that something possessing merely subjective validity is also objectively true. The relationship between reason and individuality presented in the *Wissenschaftslehre* is just the reverse: Here, the only thing that exists in itself is reason, and individuality is something merely accidental; Reason is the end and personality is the means; the latter is

merely a particular expression of reason, one that must increasingly be absorbed into the universal form of the same.⁴⁰

The disjunction between idealism and dogmatism is as total as the freedom of the original choice between the corresponding self-conceptions. Indeed, Fichte rather strikingly claims that there is no room at all for reasoning as far as this choice is concerned. In any argument, if it is to be meaningful, the two parties must at least agree upon a common criterion of what it means to be *certain* of the truth of a particular claim. Yet a shared notion of certainty is precisely what is missing in the standoff between someone who takes himself to be causally determined (a dogmatist) and someone who asserts his power of self-determination (an idealist).⁴¹ The dogmatist only accepts arguments that somehow inculcate truth into his mind, analogously to the sensory impingement of objects upon the mind. The idealist can only disappoint this expectation, however, for his arguments must eventually bottom out in the immediate evidence of intellectual intuition; for the idealist, the ultimate foundation of all certitude is the self-certainty of spontaneous mental activity, which can only be attested to but not demonstrated. The dogmatist is thus condemned by his own free choice to self-misprison.

All the idealist can do in the dispute with dogmatists is point out that their claims are either self-undermining or instances of performative contradiction. For if dogmatists are right in claiming that mental contents are the products of mechanical causation, then they cannot justify their conviction of the veracity of their own thoughts. To the extent that they speak with conviction when they expound their position, however, the content of their utterance is belied by its very performance. Fichte presses this point with characteristic exasperation: "How little inner awareness must such people have of what they themselves do! Their own philosophical specimens must have been produced quite mechanically, unaccompanied by even the slightest inner attentiveness and spirit."⁴² Yet Fichte suggests that this strategy too is of limited use:

To be sure, in presupposing the thoroughgoing validity of the mechanism of cause and effect, they directly contradict themselves. What they say stands in contradiction with what they do; for, to the extent that they presuppose mechanism, they at the same time elevate themselves above it. Their own act of thinking of this relationship is an act that lies outside the realm of mechanical determinism. Mechanism cannot grasp itself, precisely because it is mechanism. Only a free consciousness is able to grasp itself. Thus it might appear that we have here discovered a means for convincing our opponents on the spot. This, however, is just where the difficulty arises, because

this is an observation that lies entirely outside of their field of vision, and because they do not possess enough mental agility and dexterity to be able, when thinking of an object, to think not merely the object in question, but also and at the same time of their own thinking of the object. By the same token, this entire remark must necessarily be incomprehensible for them, and is not intended for them at all, but is meant for others who can see and who can watch [*für andere, die da sehen, und wachen*].⁴³

Fichte here entertains an argument against materialism that can be traced back to the “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar” in Rousseau’s novel *Émile* (1762), where it is deployed against mechanistic theories of the mind. “A machine does not think,” asserts the Vicar, “there is neither motion nor figure which produces reflection.”⁴⁴ Although the Vicar could prove materialists wrong by simply pointing out their performative contradiction, he seems uninterested in convincing his adversaries and instead flatly declares that they, possessing no sentiment of their freedom, are “deaf to the inner voice crying out to them.” The influence of this Rousseauian view upon Fichte is all the more conspicuous because, unlike Rousseau’s Vicar, Fichte does recognize the argumentative opening presented by the performative contradiction at the heart of the opposing position.⁴⁵ Although Fichte’s commitment to the universality of reason would require him to exploit this opening, Fichte—unlike the young Schelling around the same time—nevertheless explicitly rejects this option and instead reverts to an exclusionary language reminiscent of Rousseau.⁴⁶ If Rousseau’s Vicar compared materialists to the deaf, Fichte now writes apropos of dogmatists that intellectual intuition “lies entirely outside of their field of vision” because their false self-understanding impedes their mental agility and prevents them from thinking their own thinking.

In fact, Fichte makes the psychologically perceptive suggestion that the dogmatist, threatened in the very core of his being by idealist arguments, will defend his position with blind vehemence precisely because “there is something within his own inner self which agrees with his assailant.”⁴⁷ This defensive rancor, fuelled by repression, will tend to be intensified by the idealist’s irrepressible contempt toward his dogmatist opponent, a contempt born of a different kind of familiarity: “For one becomes an idealist only by passing through a disposition toward dogmatism.”⁴⁸ This view of the dynamic represents an obvious retreat from the assertion that no fundamental differences exist among humans so far as their capacity for reflective thought is concerned.

Nor is this retreat an exception. The claim that there is simply no arguing with dogmatists recurs in Fichte’s writings with an almost obsessive repetitiveness. Many of his statements suggest that some people are unable to understand

the *Wissenschaftslehre* not only because they fail to actualize their freedom but also because they have actually surrendered that freedom.⁴⁹ It is of course important to remember that the dogmatic outlook resulting from such surrender does not reflect mere natural necessity but is the result of free choice. Once, however, freedom is renounced, it is difficult to see how it could be reclaimed; its renunciation has become an irrevocable fact, not unlike a natural constraint. Fichte thus tends to view the choice between dogmatism and idealism as one that precedes all reason-giving activity and determines in the first place what one accepts as a binding reason. To that extent, the choice in question might be likened to the prenatal act by which souls departed to the underworld choose their next life in the myth of Er in Book 10 of Plato's *Republic*—or, more pertinently, to the extratemporal act by which the “intelligible character” of an agent determines her “empirical character” according to the *Critique of Practical Reason*.⁵⁰

This starting point imposes a limit on the degree to which the *Wissenschaftslehre* can be communicated in a discursive manner. Hence Fichte's belief that the idealist and the dogmatist live in incommensurable worlds and that the choice between the two positions ultimately depends on what one originally takes oneself to be: an inert thing or a locus of free activity.⁵¹ To quote one of Fichte's most famous claims: “The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it.”⁵²

Accordingly, Fichte often preempts criticism by asserting that for some people the idealism of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is bound to be incomprehensible—and that, far from being a thing to lament, this is actually proof of its validity. For instance, in a footnote in the 1794 *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* Fichte contends that the dogmatic defenders of the “letter” of Kantianism fail to grasp its spirit because they fail to recognize themselves *qua* free subjects:

The majority of men could sooner be brought to believe themselves a piece of lava in the moon than to take themselves for an I. Hence they have never understood Kant, or read his mind; hence, too, they will not understand this exposition, though the condition for all philosophizing lies at its head. Anyone who is not yet at one with himself on this point has no understanding of any fundamental philosophy, and needs none. Nature, whose machine he is, will lead him, even without his own cooperation, into all the occupations that are his to pursue. Philosophizing calls for independence, and this one can only confer on oneself.⁵³

The preface to the 1797 “First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*” concludes with an even harsher dismissal of the philosophically challenged:

I write only for readers who continue to harbor an inner sense for the certainty or the dubitability, the clarity or the confusion, of their own cognition. I write for readers for whom science and conviction still retain some meaning and who are themselves driven by a lively zeal to seek the same. I wish to have nothing to do with those who, as a result of protracted spiritual servitude, have lost their selves and, along with this loss of themselves, have lost any feeling for their own conviction, as well as any belief in the conviction of others. . . . I would be sorry if I were understood by people of this sort. To date, this wish has been fulfilled so far as they are concerned; and I hope that, in the present case as well, these prefatory remarks will so confuse them that, from now on, they will be unable to see anything beyond the mere letters, inasmuch as what passes for spirit in their case [*was bei ihnen die Stelle des Geistes vertritt*] will be yanked back and forth by the secret fury pent up within them.⁵⁴

This way of thinking about the presuppositions and the limits of philosophical discourse permeates Fichte’s writing. It is, however, a measure of the influence Fichte exerted upon his contemporaries that one of the most emphatic formulations of this esoteric view comes not from Fichte himself but from the young Schelling. Lacking the note of defiance, even aggression, audible in Fichte’s remarks, Schelling’s formulations imbue idealism with a pious sense of the mystical. Yet, if anything, Schelling’s exclusion of the uncomprehending from his audience is even more categorical than Fichte’s. As Paul Franks observes, whereas Fichte gave up only the aspiration for universal acknowledgment but retained the claim to universal validity, Schelling in this period also gives up the latter.⁵⁵ Since, according to Schelling, both dogmatism and idealism entail ways of living and actualizing the position that one espouses, Schelling believes that each actually holds true of its respective proponents. The hermeneutic gulf that Fichte sees between the two positions thus becomes a metaphysical one for Schelling. This fact goes some way toward explaining the pathos of Schelling’s pronouncements. In concluding a 1797 treatise inspired by Fichte, Schelling stakes out the limits of intelligibility as follows:

[A] philosophy whose first principle it is to evoke for *consciousness* the *spiritual* in man, i.e., that which lies *beyond* consciousness, must necessarily prove quite incomprehensible for those who have not rehearsed and strengthened this spiritual consciousness, or who can present for themselves even the most sublime aspects of their [soul] only in the form of lifeless *concepts* devoid of all intuition. The immediate, which exists in everyone and whose primordial intuition (which also exists in

everyone, though they may not always be conscious of it) conditions the certainty of all our knowledge and can never become comprehensible for anyone through mere words. The medium through which spirits communicate with one another is not the surrounding air but the communal freedom whose reverberations extend to the innermost regions of the soul. Wherever man's spirit is not *imbued* with the consciousness of freedom, all spiritual communication, not only with others but even with *his own self*, is interrupted; no wonder then, that the spirit remains as incomprehensible for itself as it is for others, and that in its dreadful solitude it merely exhausts itself with vain *words* that remain unanswered by any sympathetic resonance (be it from its own or from another's bosom). To remain incomprehensible to such a person is nothing short of a blessing and an honor before God and man.⁵⁶

The pride that Fichte and Schelling take in not being understood by some of their readers is indicative of a pronounced esoteric strain in their authorial self-conception. Incomprehensibility is a touchstone of profundity, however, only so long as it is not irremediable. Alluding to a claim made by Fichte in an earlier issue of the same journal, Schelling goes on to praise Fichte's philosophy of freedom for finally unlocking the deepest secrets of philosophical systems that have hitherto passed for obscure:

The history of philosophy offers examples of systems that remained a riddle throughout several epochs. A recent philosophy whose principles are rumored to solve all extant riddles comments on Leibniz that he was probably the only one with genuine conviction in the entire history of philosophy, hence the only one to be *fundamentally* [*im Grunde*] right. This statement deserves our attention for it suggests that the time has come to understand Leibniz. For surely he must not be understood as he has been understood thus far, if indeed he is to be proven *fundamentally* right.⁵⁷

Schelling is alluding here to a passage in Fichte's "Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*," published in the previous issue of *Philosophisches Journal*. In section 10 of that work, Fichte claimed that nothing but the truth can be the object of absolute conviction, and that such perfect conviction is thoroughly compatible with the incommunicability of the truth in question. Leibniz might have been convinced in this strict sense, surmised Fichte, since "understood correctly, he is in the right," and his entire life as well as his philosophical style suggest that he understood himself correctly.⁵⁸ The irony of Schelling's claim about the retrospective illumination owed to Fichte lies in the suggestion that the obscurity of Leibniz's work should now be dispelled by the emphatically esoteric writings of his successor. Implausible as this may sound, it makes sense against the background of the metaphilosophical considerations just outlined.

It is precisely because the Fichtean philosophy of spirit acknowledges the insufficiency of the letter and demands the reader's independent thought that it can reanimate the nonliteral, "spiritual" truth of past philosophies.

Not only does Schelling claim that the absolute cannot be communicated to the unfree; he also suggests that those who cut themselves off from it thereby deprive themselves of the power to speak intelligibly. To repeat Schelling's verdict, quoted this time in Coleridge's unacknowledged adaptation in *Biographia Literaria*, "where the spirit of a man is not *filled* with the consciousness of freedom . . . all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself. No wonder then, that he remains incomprehensible to himself as well as to others."⁵⁹ An author who has not fully actualized his freedom through self-reflection can neither fully understand himself nor make himself fully understood to his readers; and only the rare reader who has completed the path of self-reflection can understand the reasons why such an author had to remain mired in confusion and self-contradiction. As in Kant's case, the hermeneutics of spirit is a double-edged sword in the implied antagonism between the author's and the reader's independent thought. If the hermeneutics of spirit authorizes the writer to teach the reader how to understand himself, by the same token the author who cannot fully understand himself may be better understood by his reader.

Not surprisingly, few contemporaries shared Schelling's sympathy for Fichte's unsparing pronouncements about his audience. Although Fichte's arguments were bound to elicit controversy irrespective of his querulous style, the chances of sympathetic reception could not have been much improved by Fichte's tendency to declare anyone unconvinced of his truth morally corrupt or indeed nonexistent as a subject—as in the notorious "act of annihilation" levelled against C. E. Schmid in 1796.⁶⁰ Many of Fichte's contemporaries took offense at such abrasive statements. Others found his posturing ridiculous.⁶¹ Yet one may also suspect, following Paul Franks, that Fichte's jarring pronouncements were "protections against madness," compensating a deep-seated anxiety that his thoughts may not be "expressive of the human mind he shares with others."⁶² On this interpretation, Fichte's imputation to his incomprehending readers of a "secret fury pent up within them" may be seen as a case of defensive projection. Indeed Fichte himself confessed to "dark forebodings" in a passage from 1794 in which he describes the precarious position of a writer inspired by "spirit," oscillating between elation and anguish:

[I]n certain moods, the opposition of the whole world of rational beings would not move him an inch, since his belief does not come to him from outside, but he has

discovered it in his own heart. Nevertheless he questions and investigates carefully, in the dark forebodings of anxious hours, whether others believe the same thing, and at such times he might well need just such a lightly valued support as the agreement of others.⁶³

Eager to preempt the sort of objection that Hegel would level against him, Fichte was ready to consider the objection that reserving insight for “certain privileged spirits” is “an evil example, a piece of deplorable fanaticism” (*beillose Schwärmererei*).⁶⁴ Again and again, he insisted that he did not deny the universal capacity for freedom and rationality. His esoteric stance was merely meant to reflect his recognition that sociopolitical pressures predisposed humans to abnegate their freedom and regard themselves as determined, leaving the philosopher with no option other than turning away from those who have succumbed to such tendencies.

TRANSCENDENTAL PEDAGOGY

Fichte’s thinking about the prospects of philosophical communication had not always been so pessimistic. When he first presented his Science of Knowledge, he still believed that the cause of philosophy could be advanced through the education of the public and the realization of political freedom. Thus, in lectures given in 1794 and 1795 and published as *On the Vocation of the Scholar*, Fichte still claimed that contingencies of individual formation could be overcome through satisfaction of a “social drive” conjoining the “drive to communicate” and the “drive to receive.”⁶⁵ Yet the hostile reactions and misconceptions with which the *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* was met and the vicious attacks on Fichte during the so-called atheism controversy were bound to temper his previously sanguine hopes about the dissemination of insight. His intensified involvement in Freemasonry following the controversy signaled his resigned conclusion that philosophy must retreat to an esoteric counterculture based on oral transmission of wisdom.⁶⁶

The difficulty confronting Fichte was in no small part a matter of rhetoric. This dimension of the issue became clear early on in Fichte’s career. His 1795 treatise “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language” suggests that rational self-determination is not just compatible with letting others’ linguistic statements influence one’s own thinking, but indeed is also paradigmatically displayed to others in the ability to accept and reciprocate such influence.⁶⁷ However, this notion still does not explain how a linguistic statement might

actually instill freedom in the listener or the reader. That question stood in the forefront of the debate that ended up destroying Fichte's friendship with Schiller in 1795. A conflict erupted between the two figures when Fichte submitted his letters *On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy* for publication in Schiller's journal *Die Horen*, whose editorial board included Fichte. In his letters, Fichte critiqued Schiller's idea of aesthetic education on the grounds that, since "taste" already presupposes freedom, "the idea of elevating men through aesthetic education to be worthy of freedom, and to freedom itself, will get us into a vicious circle."⁶⁸ Given such overt polemicizing against the central idea of Schiller's *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man* it is not entirely surprising that Schiller eventually rejected the text. An acrimonious exchange ensued.⁶⁹

It is clear from this exchange that both Schiller and Fichte wanted to remedy the increasingly shallow tastes of the wider public by reviving intellectual earnestness and independent thought in the Kantian spirit. Their disagreement concerned the rhetoric best suited to this goal, and in particular the proper relationship between abstract concepts and concrete images. Schiller criticized the "mere alternation" between arguments and images in Fichte's text, whereas Fichte objected to Schiller's manner of infusing the ideal with sensuous, individual elements. Whereas Fichte's misgivings were motivated by the Platonic suspicion that poetic writing tended to cloud reason, Schiller charged that Fichte's seamlessly constructed arguments allowed no room for free reflection. Disagreeing on this point, each of the two authors accused the other of shallow popularity purchased through obscurity. The resultant parting of ways, an important modern reenactment of the ancient debate between philosophers and poets, signaled the end of the alliance between Jena idealism and Weimar classicism.

The fact that both Schiller and Fichte taught at the University of Jena only added to the acrimony of their dispute. The popularity enjoyed by the charismatic Fichte partly accounted for the irritation of his less rhetorically effective senior colleague. Widely admired for his gripping lectures, Fichte, in his writings, repeatedly felt compelled to resort to the rhetoric of speech. The reason for this tendency emerges quite clearly from Fichte's recurrent worries about the inevitable misunderstandings entailed by written communication, which recall the Socratic argument against writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*. By 1804 Fichte's mistrust of written communication had become so thoroughgoing that he submitted a request to the Prussian royal cabinet in which he invoked his need "to confine himself to oral communication, so that misunderstanding can thereby be detected and eliminated on the spot."⁷⁰

As Sean Franzel has recently argued, however, Fichte's authorial practice cannot be fully described as a phantasmagoric simulation of unmediated orality, of the sort trenchantly identified in deconstructive readings.⁷¹ What a reading along this line could not account for is the novelty of Fichte's authorial self-understanding in comparison to Kant's. As a university lecturer Kant still hewed to the relatively humble role of a public servant of the absolutist state who was transmitting pragmatic and traditional knowledge, and it is only in his written works that Kant positioned himself as a critical philosopher addressing an audience of intellectuals committed to free inquiry. Fichte rejected this strict differentiation of institutional functions and extended Kant's vision of the print public sphere to the university lecture. Enacting what Franzel calls an oral "remediation" of print media, Fichte urged his listeners to imagine themselves as readers.⁷² Correspondingly, Fichte laid claim to authorial originality even in his teaching. He was, in fact, the first professor of philosophy to use his own manuscripts rather than standard textbooks and compendia for university lectures.⁷³

This complication makes it all the more urgent for Fichte to clarify the status of written communication. If understanding is a matter of spontaneous mental activity, how can a text communicate philosophical meanings and how are readers to comport themselves vis-à-vis the written text? It is with respect to this question that the metaphor of dead letter and living spirit, rich in theological resonances, acquires special significance for Fichte's self-understanding and idealist hermeneutics in general. As Fichte wrote to Reinhold, the "body" in which the "spirit" of his thought is clothed only fits it "loosely" and is "easily tossed aside," for his propositions are devoid of sense if they do not elicit "inner intuition" from the reader.⁷⁴ Given that Fichte draws on Kant's own statements in justifying his revisionist interpretation of Kant (discussed in chapter 2), it is not surprising that Fichte's use of the distinction between the letter and the spirit in many ways follows Kant's. Both authors use the term *spirit* to refer to a specific law of spontaneous mental activity in contradistinction to the concrete products of such activity. This use of the term is evident in Kant's praise for the "spirit" of systematic thoroughness inaugurated by Wolff, in his distinction between conformity to the letter of the moral law (legality) and fidelity to its spirit (morality), as well as in his idea of the spirit as opposed to the letter of the social contract;⁷⁵ and Fichte employs the term in the same sense when he invokes the "spirit of Kant's philosophy." Both authors also occasionally write of "spirit" pure and simple, understood as a general principle of free mental activity, almost anticipating the Hegelian use. This use of the term informs reflections on the transcendental dimension that underlies and hence eludes referential signification.

The two senses are intimately linked in Kant and very nearly coincide in Fichte. For both thinkers, that which deserves emulation in a precursor's works has to be defined in terms of spirit as such, where spirit is understood as the progressive activity of thought that eludes all ordinary language tailored to empirical representations.

These two interconnected uses of the term *spirit* come together in a third one, according to which a text possesses spirit if its letter conveys a sense of the elusive transcendental dimension. Kant's definition of "spirit, in the aesthetic sense," as "the enlivening principle in the mind" that enables the mind to project a sensible manifold eliciting a self-perpetuating play of the faculties, belongs under this heading.⁷⁶ As for Fichte, in his unfinished series of letters *On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy* (1794) he explicitly raises the question of how a text might convey spirit. The closest Fichte comes to answering this question is in the claim that an author can imbue his work with spirit when he "silences individuality" and allows his discourse to be inspired (*begeistert*) solely by that which is universally human in him: the free, self-reflexive activity of the mind.⁷⁷ A work composed in this manner can captivate readers' attention to the point where they forget their individuality in the encounter. Not unlike the work of the Kantian genius enables the subject of aesthetic judgment to recognize himself as a representative of universal transcendental subjectivity, the work of the inspired writer envisioned by Fichte solicits and reveals active powers latent in the reader's mind, so that he must marvel:

How does a work created by a man receive that vitalizing force and where does the ingenious [*geistvolle*] artist learn the secret of breathing it into a work of art? While looking at his work I discover with pleasant surprise gifts and talents in myself which I didn't know I possessed. In gauging the effect of his work did he assume these talents in me? Without doubt, for where else would his success come from? But who revealed to him my innermost being, to which I myself was a stranger?⁷⁸

Fichte's answer in the next letter reads: "Nowhere but in the depths of his own breast can the ingenious [*geistvolle*] artist have discovered what lies in mine, though it is hidden from my own eyes and from everyone else's."⁷⁹ This passage clearly indicates the point at which Fichte's conception of spirit deviates from the Kantian notion. According to Kant, aesthetic response to an inspired work occasions a noncognitive disclosure of our aptitude for cognition—or, what amounts to the same when viewed from the other side of the emerging subject-object dialectic, a noncognitive disclosure of the suitability of the sensible manifold for our cognition. If the work of art is to engender a multitude of rep-

resentations that eludes conceptual subsumption (what Kant calls an “aesthetic idea”), it cannot be a product of conscious rule-following; it must be the product of an unconsciously creative artistic genius. Through the theory of genius, Kant anchors spirit in noumenal nature. Having discarded the thing-in-itself, however, Fichte cannot fall back on the Kantian conception of unintentional production. For him spirit can only be a matter of rational thought. This is why Fichte claims that the inspired writer invests his work with spirit on the strength of an enhanced self-reflexivity that ultimately tends toward transcendental reflection.

The inspired writer, as described by Fichte, knows the reader better than he himself; he reveals “my innermost being, to which I myself was a stranger.” In light of this insight the reader is aware of himself no longer as a contingent person but as a representative of universal transcendental subjectivity. Yet this universalism also works in the opposite direction, relativizing the writer’s hermeneutic authority. For if spirit refers to the self-recognition of transcendental subjectivity, then the writer as a contingent individual has no privileged access to it, and the reader too may understand the author better than he himself. As I have shown in the previous chapter, this recognition plays a crucial role in unleashing the dynamic of post-Kantian idealism. The hermeneutics of spirit grants each party in the author-reader transaction the radical possibility of understanding the other better than he understands himself, thereby immensely raising the stakes involved in both writing and reading. “Spirit,” in this context, comes to signify a dimension of meaning that transcends the finite horizon of both author and reader, even though it is at work in both. If Fichte suggests that the animation of the reader’s mind requires that he first be passively affected by the inspired writer’s work, elsewhere he also insists—anticipating Hegel’s program of phenomenological observation—that the philosophical *writer* must be receptive in registering thought’s self-movement.⁸⁰ Philosophical authorship thus requires a transition from the receptivity of self-observation to the activity of its discursive rehearsal, whereas a philosophically fruitful reading is one in which receptivity toward the text gives way to an active response. It thus becomes impossible to distribute the poles of passivity and activity between the writer and the reader. Rather, within each position, a divide must be maintained between the passivity of the embodied, contingent person and the spontaneous activity of thought.

Yet, can an authorial strategy guided by this conception of spirit offer a viable solution to the familiar circularity problem that vitiated so many programs of Enlightenment pedagogy from Rousseau to Schiller? In his treatise on the letter and the spirit, Fichte repeatedly suggests that, in order to be inspired by the

spirit of a work, the reader must give up his freedom and lose himself in the act of reading. Indirectly, to be sure, but only indirectly, such extreme receptivity is conducive to the reader's freedom: it leads to the animation of hitherto latent mental powers, so that "if one day, for other reasons, we decide in freedom to take possession of these powers, we find half the resistance removed and half the work done."⁸¹ Nevertheless, in view of Fichte's second formulation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, his account from 1795 of the effect of writing upon the reader betrays a circularity that may be even more damaging than the circularity that Fichte detected in Schiller's conception. Although the propaedeutic of philosophical reading can reinforce the reader's propensity for free self-determination, this potentiality is realized only through an act of freedom by which I take myself to be an intellectually intuiting subject. That route is irrevocably closed off, however, if someone has already adopted a dogmatic self-understanding. Fichte recognizes this problem with characteristic honesty:

If idealism should prove to be the only true philosophy, then from this it would follow that in order to philosophize one must be born a philosopher, must be reared as a philosopher, and must educate oneself as a philosopher. But no application of human art or skill can make one into a philosopher. This science, therefore, does not expect to make many converts among people who are already firmly set in their ways. If it may entertain any hopes at all in this regard, these are pinned on the young, whose innate energy has not yet been ruined by the slackness of the age.⁸²

As it should be clear by now, this pedagogical impasse follows in an inevitable manner from the radical idea of free self-grounding.

The issue emerging from Fichte's reflections on the preconditions of philosophical insight and his related efforts to forge a viable model of authorship thus take us back to the problem of Enlightenment pedagogy already broached vis-à-vis Kant. In the context of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, this problem looms large because Fichte's doctrine cannot generate arguments that might persuade one to make the transition from the standpoint of ordinary experience to the philosophical standpoint of absolute subjectivity. Fichte's emphasis on the role of personal character indicates that, to quote Daniel Breazeale, "the very possibility of transcending the standpoint of life and raising oneself to the level of philosophizing is dependent upon the specific character of one's 'ordinary standpoint.'"⁸³ This dependence raises a host of difficult questions. What kind of writing might have the power to influence the character of its readers? Is it possible at all to induce autonomous thought in others, and if yes how? If it is indeed the case that one can attain insight into one's own character as a self-

conscious subject *only* through one's free choice and, moreover, if the wrong choice permanently bars the path to true self-understanding, then what is the point of writing a work of transcendental philosophy, and to whom are such works addressed? How acute this problem becomes for Fichte can be inferred from his work from 1801, whose subtitle echoes Rousseau's assertion of the need to force people to be free—*A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*.

Is there a less violent way of breaking the vicious circle of heteronomy, then? The sole alternative envisioned by Fichte is a kind of Platonic-Socratic education, *anamnesis* through dialogical “midwifery.” This would seem to be a metaphilosophical equivalent of Fichte's account of the genesis of self-consciousness in the 1796 *Foundations of Natural Right*, according to which I am awakened to a consciousness of my freedom by the “summons” to free action issued by another consciousness. Fichte describes this pedagogical procedure as follows:

The *Wissenschaftslehre* will become universally comprehensible and easy to understand just as soon as it becomes the main goal and deliberate aim of all education, from the earliest age, only to develop the pupil's inner energy and not to channel it in any particular direction, i.e., just as soon as we begin to educate human beings for their own purposes and as instruments of their own will and not as soulless instruments for the use of others. Education of the whole person from earliest youth: This is the only way to propagate philosophy. At first, such an education must resign itself to being more negative than positive; i.e., it must consist only of interaction with the pupil and must not seek to exercise any influence upon him.⁸⁴

In fact, a textual equivalent of this type of negative pedagogy is outlined in the preface to the 1794 *Foundations*, where Fichte remarks:

It is particularly necessary to recall, I think, that I do not tell the reader everything, but have also wished to leave him something to think about. There are numerous misunderstandings that I certainly anticipate, and that a few words of mine could have rectified. Yet I have not said these few words, because I wished to encourage independent thought. The Science of Knowledge should in no way *force* itself upon the reader, but should become a *necessity* [*Bedürfnis*] for him, as it has for the author himself.⁸⁵

The hoped-for parallelism between author and reader is based on Fichte's aspiration to write on behalf of the transcendental “I.” Even when his rhetoric takes on an overtly monological character, the “I” speaking in his writings is supposed to refer not to the contingent person of Johann Gottlieb Fichte but to a universal subject position that the reader must actively impersonate. What this authorial

self-understanding implies for the reader is made clear in the preface to Fichte's 1800 book *The Vocation of Man*:

I still need to remind a few readers that the "I" who speaks in the book is by no means the author. Rather, the author wishes that the reader may come to see himself in this "I"; that the reader may not simply relate to what is said here as he would to history, but rather that while reading he will actually converse with himself, deliberate back and forth, deduce conclusions, make decisions like his representative in the book, and through his own work and reflection, purely out of his own resources, develop and build within himself the philosophical disposition [*Denkart*] that is presented to him in this book merely as a picture.⁸⁶

In fact, the communicative ideal adumbrated here, defined in terms of authorial self-effacement and a basic gesture of invitation, is rarely realized in Fichte's writings. The hectoring tone that so often surfaces in his works bears witness to the sovereign assurance of a writer who tends to relegate his readers to a thoroughly passive role. Being convinced that a consistent actualization of freedom can only lead to the one and only true doctrine that he has forged, Fichte envisages a strict parallelism between his and the reader's path of self-reflection. What it takes for a reader to understand Fichte is, according to him, to think independently—but think the very same thoughts as he has thought. His exposition leaves no more room for alternate possibilities than do free elections in a one-party state. To be sure, Fichte often mimics dialogical form to preempt objections. By thus integrating opposing voices into his discourse, however, he only consolidates his monological sovereignty. Fichte's wish "to compel readers to understand," openly avowed in the subtitle of the *Crystal Clear Report*, only makes the contradiction blatantly clear. After all, following Fichte's own premises, no one can understand transcendental philosophy unless he has already, prior to all communication, grasped himself as a free subject—in which case, however, he has no need to be compelled to understand.

At this juncture, it is worth returning to Husserl's criticism of the transcendental "style" of philosophy introduced by Kant. As Husserl points out, the doctrine of the transcendental constitution of objects requires a "complete reversal" of ordinary comportments, the espousal of a position which is bound to appear outrageously far-fetched to natural consciousness. The readiness or refusal to perform such a turn is undoubtedly a matter of the concrete individual's agency. "Can the ego which posits itself, of which Fichte speaks, be anything other than Fichte's own?" asks Husserl.⁸⁷ It is, however, as Husserl notes, equally possible

for a subject to persist in his naïve self-consciousness as a constituted empirical person, blind to the dimension of transcendental constitution.

Fichte and Schelling are not exactly silent on why and how the choice between these alternative self-conceptions is made. Moreover, each of them attempts to deduce the robust realism of our everyday dealings from the absolute principle of constitutive subjectivity. Yet in its single-minded preoccupation with the project of explaining everyday realism in idealist terms, transcendental philosophy has difficulties accounting for the conditions of its own genesis within the situated praxis of philosophical reflection. However sheltered and rarefied, this praxis is still, as Husserl insists, a concrete psychological subject's way of participating in the world of experience. To be sure, Fichte does recognize the dependence of reflective insight upon the philosopher's psychology and the formative influence of societal and political factors upon one's psychological make-up. Husserl's critique points in the direction of what Fichte would appear to need in order to secure the transition from the everyday standpoint to the standpoint of philosophy: a nonsophistic rhetoric along the lines of Plato's *Phaedrus*, based on a sufficiently differentiated picture of the individual psyche as a part of the social and the natural world.⁸⁸ To be sure, the agenda of transcendental philosophy leaves little room, if any, for considerations of anthropology and empirical psychology. However, it does not preclude attention to linguistic form, and a keen awareness of this dimension is precisely what would enable Friedrich Schlegel to give Fichtean idealism a strikingly original twist.

4

FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL ON TEXTUAL COMMUNICATION

SCHLEGEL ON THE SPIRIT OF FICHTE'S PHILOSOPHY

In a strictly historical sense, the importance of Fichte's thought for his contemporary Friedrich Schlegel is beyond dispute. From the summer of 1795 onward, Fichte's philosophy exerted a formative influence upon Schlegel's theoretical preoccupations.¹ The facts of the interaction between the two writers are extensively documented. We know that during his time in Jena, between the summer of 1796 and the summer of 1797, Schlegel frequently met with Fichte and assisted him in editing his *Philosophische Journal*. However, the theoretical ramifications of this relationship are far from obvious.

Most attempts at clarifying the importance of the interaction between the two authors focus on the 1794 *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*. My point of departure, however, will be the second major formulation of Fichte's system, the incomplete *Attempt at a New Representation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, published in three parts between 1797 and 1798. My reason for this approach is two-fold: First, my aim is to clarify how Schlegel's strikingly original model of textual communication emerged out of his engagement with Fichte, and it is precisely in the texts from the incomplete *Attempt* that Fichte himself most explicitly deals with this problematic. Second, there is considerable evidence that can be marshaled in support of the claim that the *Attempt* represents a key juncture in the complicated relationship between Fichte and Schlegel. We

know from one of Fichte's footnotes in the *Attempt* that he wrote the work with a view to the review of the first four volumes of Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal* that Schlegel had published in March 1797 in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* and that contained four densely argued pages about Fichte (see chapter 2).² Significant portions of the *Attempt* can be read as a response to Schlegel's urgings in his review, to the effect that Fichte should finally demonstrate, and not merely declare, the conformity of his *Wissenschaftslehre* with Kant's intentions. The second crucial piece of evidence that speaks for the relevance of the *Attempt* is that the publication of its installments in the *Philosophisches Journal* coincided with the period during which Schlegel wrote an important series of notes on Fichte, which the editors of the *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* published under the title "Über den Geist der fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre. (1797–1798.)" ("On the Spirit of the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre*").

These hastily penned notes, full of idiosyncratic abbreviations, offer glimpses of Schlegel's thinking as it takes shape through ongoing engagement with Fichte. They can thus serve as a convenient starting point for my examination of Schlegel's response. The first thing that stands out when one reads these notes is how continuous their recurrent themes are with Fichte's authorial self-reflections in the recently published *Attempt*. It is above all the heightened metaphilosophical awareness displayed by Fichte throughout his new work that fascinates Schlegel. As he writes: "F[ichte]'s $\phi 2$ [philosophy of philosophy] is more F[ichte]an than h[is] ϕ [philosophy] therefore also better."³ Significantly, Schlegel goes on to generalize this claim in another note: "The spirit of a ϕ [philosophy] is its $\phi 2$ [philosophy of philosophy]."⁴ Schlegel's appreciation for this aspect of Fichte's new presentation is also evident in the *Athenäum* fragment no. 281, where he writes: "Especially the new presentation [*Darstellung*] of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is always simultaneously philosophy and philosophy of philosophy."⁵

Schlegel's emphasis on the metaphilosophical aspects of Fichte's work testifies to his fascination with a key dimension of transcendental idealism. To be sure, the self-reflexive bent of philosophical thinking is hardly peculiar to idealism. Since Plato, it has never been possible to maintain a sharply drawn separating line between substantive philosophical investigation and reflection on the nature of philosophy as such. Yet such a separation would be especially questionable in the context of the mode of thinking typical to German idealism, which often makes metatheoretical concerns decisive for the way in which a given substantive question is addressed. Again and again in the works of post-Kantian idealist thinkers, appeals are made to requirements of systematicity and to general tenets concerning the nature of philosophical knowledge in order to

justify substantive claims. Concern with the possibility, necessity, and justification of the philosophical standpoint, as well as with the forms of life and the modes of communication in which philosophy can actualize itself thus become integral to the treatment of specific philosophical problems.

If, for Fichte, such reflection must inevitably involve consideration of the means of philosophical communication, in Schlegel's response to Fichte this topic comes to occupy center stage. For Schlegel, the privileging of Fichte's metaphilosophy over his substantive claims entails the demand that particularly close attention be paid to formal features of his writings. As Schlegel writes in one of his notes: "F[ichte]'s form is infinite[ly] more valuable than his matt[er]."⁶ In fact, Schlegel all but asserts a terminological equivalence between the spirit of a philosophical conception (i.e., its metaphilosophical underpinnings) and its textual form. This explains the equivocation essential to Schlegel's use of the term *form*. *Form* sometimes appears to refer to a characteristic form of textual presentation (*Darstellung*) and is accordingly associated with the "tone and style" of a philosophical work as well as its "method."⁷ In another set of remarks, however, Schlegel's implicit equivocation between the form of a philosophy and its tacit metaphilosophy appears to parallel the connection established by Kant between the logical forms of representation (in the sense of *Vorstellung*) and self-consciousness. That is, much as the logical forms of representation (for Kant, the categories) are anchored in my tacit awareness of what I *do* in representing, so the criteria determining what I accept as a valid philosophical claim ultimately depend on what I take myself to be doing when I engage in philosophy—that is, in my "philosophy of philosophy."

The connection suggested by Schlegel between the logical and the textual senses of form also bears witness to the necessary reliance of philosophical communication upon rhetoric. Although the argumentative content of a philosophical text is never sufficient for persuading a reader who rejects the very manner of argumentation practiced by an author, the author's mode of linguistic presentation may nevertheless convey a compelling sense of his *way* of thinking, arguing, and doing philosophy. Even a reader who is initially impervious to the cogency of a train of thought can be induced by its textual form to adopt the viewpoint required for its reenactment. As any reader of Fichte must realize at some point, this rhetorical dimension of idealist philosophizing is indispensable for its purported power to achieve universal recognition of its truth.

The primacy accorded by Schlegel to the spirit and the form of a given philosophy over its material substance thus harks back to the Kantian invocation of the spirit of Wolff's philosophy as something to be emulated. Kant, as previously

discussed, reconciled his insistence on independent thought with his comprehensive claim about the necessity of emulation by arguing that models teach us only how to think, not what to think. Similarly to Kant, Schlegel envisions a form of receiving and appropriating a predecessor's work that is active and especially attuned to the metaphilosophical dimensions of that work. It is when we attend to the link between metaphilosophical premises and textual form that the originality of Schlegel's conception comes into view.⁸ Whereas Kant and Fichte have little to say about how the spirit is wedded to the letter, and indeed often tend to divorce the former from the latter, Schlegel posits an essential connection between the two.

Given Schlegel's emphasis on the importance of the form of a given philosophy, it is not surprising that he refused to write off Fichte's animadversions toward his audience as symptoms of bad temper. As Schlegel came to see, Fichte's troubled authorial self-understanding and the idiosyncrasies in his writings stemmed from the very spirit of his thought. Thus Schlegel proposed that "F[ichte]'s polemic is, as far as the ϕ [philosophy] in it is concerned, the applied part of his ϕ^2 [philosophy of philosophy]."⁹ The same conjunction of metatheoretical and textual interests is in evidence in Schlegel's 1797 review of the centrality of Fichte's method of experimental self-construction.¹⁰ Indeed, this idea was to become integral to Schlegel's own systematic attempts. In his 1801 lectures, Schlegel characterized transcendental philosophy as an experiment combining self-construction with self-observation, which everyone must start anew.¹¹ And even in a later phase of his thinking, when Schlegel published a volume of Lessing's writings in 1804, his dedication to Fichte included the following passage:

For knowledge is, as is well known, not a mere mechanism but it arises from one's own free thought. People do not easily resolve upon it, they must be educated to that end; slumbering in torpor, the power of their spirit must be awakened, irritated and excited in various ways. . . . [O]f what avail is the wealth of thoughts conceived perhaps by others in the past if the power of the thinker himself does not become astir and active anew?¹²

If the principal task of philosophical writing is here derived from an emphatically Fichtean, activist idea of cognition, conversely Schlegel also suggests that the interpretive appropriation of past philosophies requires independent intellectual activity. Continuing and modifying the line of thought initiated by Fichte in his letters "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," Schlegel suggests that a work's capacity to induce self-reflection in the reader depends on nonreferen-

tial, literary features. Since a “rigorous method” already presupposes the reader’s intellectual autonomy, “freer forms” are more suitable for “stimulating this spirit of independent thought.”

In order to clarify what Schlegel means by “freer forms” in this text dedicated to Fichte, I take a brief detour through Fichte’s earlier considerations concerning form and content in the first systematic presentation of his philosophy, the 1794 work *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*. Here Fichte rehearses the crucial Kantian distinction between the content and the logical form of knowledge. Fichte inherits the Kantian idea that logical forms correspond to functions of the mind’s constitutive activity and as such condition every act of knowledge. Form, in this sense, determines the logical connection between judgments pertaining to particular contents and the “ground of justification” (*Rechtsgrund*) that underwrites them.¹³ The logical form of all knowledge constitutes, in turn, the content of Fichte’s science of knowledge. This discipline submits the otherwise unconscious “manner in which the intellect acts” (*Handlungsart der Intelligenz überhaupt*) to reflective scrutiny.¹⁴ This line of investigation is more radical than a merely formal logic. Since, presumably, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is itself an instance of formally consistent knowledge, if it is to avoid infinite regress, it must be able to anchor its own form in a first principle that is both a formally necessary law of thought and an actually known determinate content.¹⁵ This first principle can only be intellectual intuition, that is, an act whose foundational status is evident from the fact that whenever the subject thinks its identity with itself (“I=I”) it is also, in virtue of that very act of thought, immediately conscious of itself as the actually existing, determinate being designated by that thought.

Fichte thinks he can show that this first principle determines not only the form of all knowledge but its manifold contents as well. If this claim holds, then any particular content posited in the context of the subject’s thinking of itself is intuited by that subject as a real object of knowledge.¹⁶ The first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* can thus explain the transition from the indeterminacy of logical form to the determinacy of knowledge. Since, moreover, philosophical reflection on this first principle requires an exercise of freedom, a willed transition from possibility to actuality, such reflection is itself a determination of that which was previously indeterminate: “The *Wissenschaftslehre*, insofar as it is supposed to be a systematic science originates in exactly the same way that all systematic sciences do, namely, through a specific determination of freedom.”¹⁷

The importance of this conception for Schlegel should be clear from the fact that its contours remain apparent even in works written well after the Jena

period. A particularly instructive case in point is Schlegel's 1804 dedication to Fichte, where Schlegel aligns the principal aspects of knowledge with the main forms of textual presentation. In doing so Schlegel closely follows Fichte's distinction among three moments: the content of knowledge, its logical form, and the first principle in which content and form coincide. Thus Schlegel declares that "prose" serves the purpose of "communicating" (*mitteilen*) the determinate content of finished thoughts; poetry "presents" (*darstellen*) something indeterminate, namely, the determining activity that imparts logical form to diverse contents; and finally, there is the subtle art that combines prosaic communication and poetic exhibition in order to express the "spirit" of the "highest science," which is preoccupied with the "very act of determining" (*das Bestimmen selbst*). Here is the paragraph in which Schlegel elaborates these divisions:

The difference of prose and poetry consists in the fact that poetry aims at presenting [*Darstellung*] where prose aims only at communication [*Mitteilung*]. To be sure, as always, there is a point in the opposition where the boundaries become blurred. In conversation, for example, and in the dialogical work of art, it is the reciprocal communication of thoughts among the speakers that is the object of presentation.—What is being presented is that which is indeterminate, which is why every presentation is something infinite; but only that which is determinate can be communicated. And what all sciences seek is not that which is indeterminate but that which is determinate. In the highest of all sciences, which does not teach some particular determinate content but has the task of determining the act of determining itself in the first place [*das Bestimmen selbst überhaupt zu bestimmen hat*], it is for that reason not sufficient to think that which is being thought [*das Gedachte*] as something already finished. This science will teach not this or that matter of thought [*Gedachte*] but thinking itself; and for that reason its communications are necessarily also presentations, for one cannot teach thinking except in the act and by example, by thinking before someone, not communicating something thought [*etwas Gedachtes*] but presenting to him thought in its becoming and emergence [*in seinem Werden und Entstehen*]. For that reason, however, the spirit of this science can be rendered completely clear only in a work of art. The boundaries become blurred, yet genres nevertheless remain forever separated, and from the seemingly simple difference that prose is aimed at communicating something determinate and poetry at presenting that which is indeterminate all other differences could be deduced.¹⁸

This passage brings to a head some of the pivotal concerns of idealist thought. Art is valorized by Schlegel as a means of initiation into autonomous thought and hence as a solution—perhaps the only solution—to the problem of Enlightenment pedagogy. The art envisioned by Schlegel conveys the "spirit" of the

highest science in that it teaches, not this or that particular thought, but how to think freely, or in Fichte's terms, how to determine one's freedom to the kind of self-reflection that yields insight into "the act of determining itself." In claiming that the artistic representation of exemplary acts of thought is indispensable to such pedagogy, Schlegel echoes the Kantian argument in favor of the free emulation of models.

Schlegel is somewhat less clear, however, when it comes to specifying the features that enable art to accomplish this task. His characterization of "dialogical works of art" as presentations of the very act of communication certainly points in the direction of an answer. Yet, a considerably different answer is suggested by the immediate context of the paragraph quoted previously, whose main objective is to defend Lessing against charges to the effect that he used too many foreign words and all-too frequently adopted a "lively colloquial tone." Schlegel responds to these accusations in terms of the Fichtean framework just laid out, by suggesting that Lessing succeeded in combining the clearly intelligible communication of finished thoughts with the thought-provoking presentation of their genesis. Thus, if Lessing's use of foreign words testifies to a terminological rigor appropriate to prosaic communication, in a corresponding manner the "dramatic," "gregarious" (*gesellig*), and dialogical aspects of Lessing's writing are subservient to its poetic, presentational function. This apology of Lessing suggests that the precisely calibrated stimulation of thought processes in the reader's mind cannot be achieved through either a blunt statement of particular ideas or a vague evocation of thinking as such. Rather, the two modalities must be interwoven. The "free, universal author" who can achieve this is—or so Schlegel suggests—more akin to Lessing, the author commemorated in this text, than to Fichte, the author to whom it is dedicated.

Schlegel's attitude toward Fichte is thus at the very least ambivalent. Rüdiger Bubner has suggested that the form of the Schlegelian fragment emerged as a bold radicalization of Fichte's authorial strategy, as a "kind of expository pendant to Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*."¹⁹ Indeed it would be hard to think of a form of writing more ideally suited to provoke independent thought than Schlegel's highly condensed constellations of concepts, offering quick glimpses of a merely implied, endless nexus of connections. As Bubner points out, however, Schlegel's appropriation of Fichte involved a productive misunderstanding, whereby Schlegel mistook the Fichtean emphasis on *Selbstdenken* as an encouragement to affirm a tendency toward the definitive overcoming of all boundaries between theory and life, between philosophers and the rest of humankind. In a letter to Schlegel written in 1800, however, Fichte politely but firmly took exception to

this construal of his views. He asserted, as he had done many times before, that the realist standpoint of “life,” premised on a natural belief in the mind’s heteronomous determination by mind-independent objects, and the fundamentally unnatural standpoint of speculation stood in irreconcilable opposition to one another. Although philosophical insight might be able to show that both perspectives are necessary moments in consciousness, no form of consciousness can entertain both perspectives at one and the same time.²⁰ Implicit in Fichte’s insistence on the foreignness of speculation to life was a profound skepticism about the possibility of making philosophy widely intelligible, a skepticism no doubt intensified by the disastrous consequences of being misunderstood in the 1798 atheism controversy.²¹

Yet Schlegel’s exoteric appropriation of Fichte is only half of the story of his encounter with Fichte. As is often the case with Schlegel, here too we find that he was thoroughly capable of entertaining contradictory views. If he praised the “popularity” of Fichte’s manner of presentation in “Über die Philosophie. An Dorothea” (1799) and often called for a seamless translation of philosophy into everyday life, in other texts from the same period he fully acknowledged the esotericism of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Thus, in his notes from 1797–98 Schlegel wrote: “One receives the [*Wissenschaftslehre*] through sense and education, not through demonstration.—False but widespread idea that that which is unintelligible should become intelligible through explanation!”²² Obviously, the prerequisites stipulated by Schlegel are not automatically imputable to every reader. Schlegel’s recognition of this fact is obvious from his assertion in the 1797 review of Fichte that those who do not perform the free act of reflection in which the *Wissenschaftslehre* originates cannot understand it.²³ While this assertion reflects a broad agreement with Fichte, far from eulogizing him as a master of popular persuasion, Schlegel often comes close to caricaturing Fichte’s esoteric pretensions. His comments in this vein include the observations that Fichte “idealizes his opponents to consummate representatives of pure nonphilosophy”; and among Schlegel’s notes we find the acerbic remark that Fichte “always needs entire books to tell people that he actually does not want to and cannot talk to them.”²⁴

Reading such witticisms as mere dismissals of Fichte would oversimplify matters. Schlegel’s ambivalence toward Fichte signals the complexities of his own aspiration as a writer. Certainly Schlegel himself was hardly innocent of the performative contradiction that he ironically attributed to Fichte, and he often implied that he prefers writing over directly addressing his audience. Consider, for example, the *Critical* fragment no. 70 from 1797, which may be read as a

diagnosis of Fichte's troubled relation to his audience: "People who write books and imagine that their readers are the public and that they must educate it [*bilden*] soon arrive at the point not only of despising their so-called public but of hating it. Which leads absolutely nowhere."²⁵ The fragment no. 35 from the same collection adumbrates a similar idea, mingling sarcasm with pathos: "One sometimes hears the public being spoken of as if it were somebody with whom one had lunch at the Hôtel de Saxe during the Leipzig Fair. Who is this public? The public is no object, but an idea, a postulate, like the Church."²⁶ Finally, it is worth quoting Schlegel's striking anticipation of the subtitle of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book For Everyone and No One*, the fragment nr. 85 from the same series: "Every honest [*rechtlche*] author writes for nobody or everybody. Whoever writes for some particular group does not deserve to be read."²⁷ In light of these remarks Schlegel appears less as a proselytizer embracing readers from all quarters than as an esoteric utopian who addresses a community of readers existing in his projection alone. This puts him in marked opposition to the polemicist Fichte, who directly addresses an audience that he must either persuade or disdain.

We might conclude that Schlegel seems to be of two minds about the communicability of philosophical insight, oscillating between a populist and an esoteric view. Not surprisingly, the former view prevails in his published writings, whereas the latter tends to surface in notes that Schlegel did not intend for publication. One might with some justification speak, then, of an exoteric and an esoteric version of Schlegel's own "philosophy of philosophy." Indeed this very duality lies at the heart of Schlegel's famous characterization of Socratic irony in the *Critical* fragment no. 108, which derives the necessity of irony from "a feeling of indissoluble antagonism . . . between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication."²⁸ Seen through the Schlegelian optic, Fichte's unremittingly earnest discourse founders precisely on his failure to acknowledge the ineluctability of this duality. To address one's readers directly as though one was speaking to them is, Schlegel suggests, to limit oneself to a hopeless choice between rhetorical aggression and arrogant disdain. It is because Schlegel refuses to assimilate the indirection of writing to direct speech that he can avoid this impasse and leave open the question of whether he is writing for nobody or everybody. This affirmation of writing is key to understanding the sense in which the mode of communication entailed by Schlegel's project is an eminently *literary* one.

CONSTRUCTED READERS

There is another sense in which Schlegel departs from Fichte that has to do with the theoretical inspiration he draws from Kantian aesthetics. As I have shown, Fichte's authorial practice remains wedded to the paradigm of everyday communication, in the context of which the recipient's interpretive activity remains constrained by the speaker's intended meaning. Thus, although Fichte repeatedly calls on his readers to engage in independent thought, his anxious wish to convey a definite thought without misunderstanding compels him to issue one directive after another to his readers. Even in the explicitly aesthetic context of the letters "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," Fichte demands that readers temporarily surrender their capacity for independent thought to the effects of the inspired work, foremost among these effects being the one whereby the author reveals aspects of his readers' subjectivity previously hidden to them. For Kant, by contrast, the properly aesthetic appreciation of art requires a bracketing of all conceptual constraints, including those imposed by authorial intentions. Because in making a pure judgment of taste the Kantian appreciator is responding only to those features of the object that are due to the nature-given disposition of the author's faculties, the Kantian theory of art renders intended meanings irrelevant to the pure judgment of taste. Indeed, as Paul Guyer has noted, "the freedom of the individual's response to the object seems like an affront to the artist's intentions for his work, while the freedom of the artist's intentions seems like a constraint on the imagination of the audience responding to his work."²⁹

Given this agonistic relation between the two poles of textual communication, one should not hope to extract from Kant's model a clear answer to the question regarding the author's and the reader's respective contributions to the meanings associated with a given work. It is precisely in the conceptual opening left by Kant that Schlegel's thinking about literary writing takes place. Of course one would look in vain for a dogmatic resolution of this matter in Schlegel's writings. What emerges instead from his relevant comments is a dynamic model of interaction that allows for indirection and indeterminacy. The contours of this model are still recognizably Kantian. According to Kant, the phenomenology of aesthetic pleasure is characterized by a conjunction between purposive activity and receptive openness to the object.³⁰ Schlegel's remarks adumbrate a similarly complex give-and-take in the process whereby meaning is constituted. The conjunction of activity and receptivity in relation to the object entails an intricate interplay between the free activity of the author and that of the reader. This interplay stands in the forefront of the *Critical* fragment no. 112:

The analytic writer observes the reader as he is; and accordingly he makes his calculations and sets up his machines in order to make the proper impression on him. The synthetic writer constructs and creates a reader as he should be; he doesn't imagine him calm and dead, but alive and critical [*lebendig und entgegenwirkend*]. He allows whatever he has created to take shape gradually before the reader's eyes, or else he tempts him to discover it himself. He doesn't try to make any particular impression on him, but enters with him into the sacred relationship of deepest symphilosophy or sympoetry.³¹

The "synthetic" writer described in these terms seeks to do justice to the basic truth upon which Novalis insists when he criticizes writers who use various typographic markers to control every aspect of the reading process. Such preemptive encroachments upon the reader's freedom stem from a refusal to accept that, as Novalis writes: "There is no universally valid reading, in the ordinary sense. Reading is a free operation. How and what I should read cannot be prescribed by anyone."³²

The ideal of authorship corresponding to this recognition represents a modern variant of Socratic pedagogy as well as a radicalization of the strategy by which Fichte sought to solicit the reader to construct his "I" in an active fashion. If Fichtean pedagogy seeks to replace "influence upon the pupil" with "interaction with him," likewise Schlegel's synthetic author seeks to treat the reader as an inherently active, self-determining subject rather than as an externally determinable object.³³ Yet the difference between the two conceptions is impossible to overlook. As I have shown in chapter 3, the freedom that Fichte grants his reader—or rather demands from him—is allowed to actualize itself in but one way, namely, in strict accordance with the one and only path of reflection prescribed by Fichte. Schlegel's synthetic author appears less single-minded, or, at the very least, less overtly so, in his pedagogical intent. He creates his reader, to be sure, yet he also imagines the reader to be alive and active. Essential to the success of his communicative practice is the indeterminacy of the text, which allows room for the reader's "lively" response.

In a certain sense, of course, this utopia of symphilosophy is not really opposed to the relentless regimen of reflection imposed by Fichte. To the extent that the synthetic writer seeks to remake his empirical reader in the image of a projected ideal reader ("creates a reader as he should be"), and insofar as the reader is encouraged to invent what the author has already constructed, the freedom ostensibly conferred upon the reader may be seen as an all-too-transparent subterfuge. Viewed in this way, the "synthetic" authorship envisioned by Schlegel appears reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectical ruse that inexorably

steers ordinary consciousness toward a predestined standpoint precisely by pretending to “let it be” and not to interfere with its self-scrutiny. Indeterminacy of effect on the local level is quite compatible with the operation of a unidirectional teleology on a larger scale. If, however, we are less intent on fixing the meaning of Schlegel’s fragment and thereby limiting the openness of the fragment form, we may recognize the ambiguity between drill-like instruction and “symphilosophizing” as crucial to the literary effect of the text. Reading Schlegel’s text in a charitable way, we might say that its very equivocation between a manipulative and a dialogical model of writing restores to its reader at least some of the freedom that its illocutionary content threatens to constrain.

It is obvious from the above that the ideal author envisioned by Schlegel—the author whom he himself emulates throughout his writings—is far less intent than Fichte on maintaining control over the act of reading. Whereas Fichte sees writing as an inferior instrument for the communication of preconceived meanings, as “dead letter” that cannot convey insight with the same ease and immunity to misconstrual as living speech, Schlegel regards writing as a fertile medium that allows room for the addressee to amplify, broaden, and play variations upon the intended meaning. The ambiguities, indirections, and uncertainties resulting from the absence of the audience thus become a positive boon in Schlegel’s eyes.

Yet how could the author’s indulgence in such ambiguities and the imputation of interpretive freedom to the reader result in a constructive or “synthetic” engagement with the reader? In order to answer this question, one does well to turn to Schlegel’s essay “On Incomprehensibility” (1800), published in the last issue of the *Athenäum*. If in the *Critical* fragment no. 112, Schlegel’s provocatively ambiguous statements about authorship may be read as exemplifying Schlegel’s notion of Socratic irony as imbued with a “feeling of indissoluble antagonism,” the essay “On Incomprehensibility” is framed as a pedagogically motivated apology born of a spirit of Socratic ignorance. The essay stages a process of self-reflection prompted by the misunderstandings to which Schlegel found himself exposed as the leading author and the editor of the journal. That these misunderstandings were not accidental is clear from the doubts, voiced in the opening passages of the essay, concerning the very possibility of communication. Communication is inherently problematic, Schlegel suggests, because interaction with others can only distract one from the mind’s self-reflexive movement away from the multiplicity of empirical relations toward the one and only true subject of thought, “which, depending on whether we seek and find it in ourselves or outside of ourselves, we designate the Nature of Things or the

Destiny of Man.”³⁴ According to Schlegel’s oddly mystical-sounding remarks, it is the incompatibility between this transcendental dimension and the realm of human interaction (*Verkehr*) that makes the misunderstandings encountered by Schlegel inevitable. Yet if naïve ideas of a straightforward exchange between author and reader must seem illusory in view of this recognition, it also identifies the challenge facing both parties. This explains why Schlegel can count on the reader’s active engagement in his authorial self-reflection. No one could be better positioned to adjudicate the question of communicability than someone who “writes a journal like the *Athenäum* or,” as Schlegel casually adds, “takes part in it as a reader.”³⁵ This parallel suggests that writer and reader play comparable roles in the constitution of meaning and that they share the same predicament with regard to communicability. Whether communication founders on the author’s unintelligibility or on the reader’s lack of intelligence—so one might formulate the thought motivating Schlegel’s parallelism—the ever-present possibility of such failures is an ineluctable consequence of human finitude.

The first step required for rethinking incomprehensibility along these lines is to reject the trivializing premise of “healthy commonsense,” which contents itself with the facile etymological derivation of “the incomprehensible” from a simple “lack of intelligence” (*Unverstand*). Schlegel proposes to develop an alternative view by means of a textual dialogue with his reader, and his way of announcing this aim suggests that such a dialogue is meant to transform his imperfect reader into an ideal one:

Now, it is a peculiarity of mine that I absolutely detest incomprehension, not only the incomprehension of the uncomprehending but even more the incomprehension of the comprehending. For this reason, I made a resolution quite some time ago to have a talk about this matter with my reader, and then create before his eyes—in spite of him as it were—another new reader to my own liking: yes, even to deduce him if need be. I meant it quite seriously and not without some of my old bent for mysticism. I wanted for once to be really thorough and go through the whole series of my essays, admit their frequent lack of success with complete frankness, and so gradually lead the reader to being similarly frank and straightforward with himself.³⁶

Once again, as in the case of the *Critical* fragment no. 112, it might seem at first glance as though Schlegel made dialogical openness subservient to the author’s sovereign freedom to create his reader. The defiant idea of constructing an ideal reader “before the eyes” and “in spite” of the actual reader only underscores the arrogance of this undertaking. Yet when Schlegel specifies how he imagines such a dialogical deduction of his reader, this turns out to be not a matter of didactic drill but an exercise in Socratic ignorance. It is the author’s survey of

his prior failures to make himself clear that is supposed to prompt the reader to reflect in turn upon his limited understanding and thus come to acknowledge what no understanding can definitively pin down. Schlegel is proposing, then, a textually mediated process of mutual reflection upon the limits of communication.

Although the idea of a Socratic dialogical pedagogy is first formulated in the essay "On Incomprehensibility" in a tentative manner and in the past tense, it actually anticipates what Schlegel proceeds to do in that essay. To be sure, he does not "construct" or "deduce" a reader in any rigorously technical sense. Nor does he actually "survey the entire chain" of his prior attempts at communication. Yet, in however digressive a manner, he does go on to examine the ways in which four exemplary fragments from earlier issues of the *Athenäum* have and might have been misunderstood by the public. By presenting an exemplary case of self-critique that invites emulation, Schlegel purports to create a reader who might be up to the formidable task of reading him.

CONFUSED AUTHORS

To see how such a reader would have to proceed, we have to consider Schlegel's conception of authorship insofar as it does not limit writing to the methodical construction of an ideal reader. The relevant dimension of writing corresponds to the problematic named in the title of the essay "On Incomprehensibility." As already mentioned, Schlegel is concerned with a type of incomprehensibility that cannot be reduced to deficiencies of the reader's intelligence. His reference to Kant's table of categories suggests a key to his own approach. In this case, however, the reverential nod only accentuates Schlegel's deviation from Kant. Whereas Kant deduced the categorical operations of the understanding from the postulated intelligibility of experience, Schlegel now undertakes to "deduce" an ideal reader from the constitutive, transcendental status of incomprehensibility. The question posed by Schlegel is not the Kantian one: What faculties must a subject have if he is to be capable of experiencing the world in a way amenable to true judgments? Instead Schlegel asks: How must a reading subject comport himself if he is to do justice to the incomprehensibility with which experience and language are riddled? Schlegel's undertaking to answer this question in the essay "On Incomprehensibility" is emphatically that of a "synthetic writer" intent on constructing, and not merely finding, his reader.

We have already seen that Schlegel's views on understanding in general and on better understanding Kant in particular are in many ways continuous with

those of Fichte and Schelling. Yet Schlegel gives the project of interpreting Kant a striking new inflection by taking up a Leibnizian rationalist concern with confused representations that indistinctly unite a great multiplicity of marks. If Alexander Baumgarten suggested that confused representations are a necessary stage on the path toward truth, Schlegel now claims that the hidden core of Kantian thought does not lie beneath the surface of his opaque presentation but rather manifests itself precisely in moments of confusion.³⁷ This theme occupies center stage in the posthumously published notes by Schlegel that the editors of the *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* collected under the title “Form of the Kantian Philosophy” (1796–1798). In one of these notes, Schlegel identifies Kant’s shortcoming as follows: “The more important the matter in Kant and the deeper his thought, the worse and more confused his presentation.”³⁸ To Schlegel’s mind, however, such opacity is not an incidental defect. He sees an essential connection between profundity and confusion: “Confusion is the effect of the transcendent (metabasis eis allo genos) in which K[ant] surpasses all other ϕ [philosophers].—<It is not a matter of imperf[ect] present.[ation] nor of t[he] language borrowed from Wolf and Leibn[iz] nor of the novelty of his view—but of t[he] inner construction]. >”³⁹

In attempting to specify the idea adumbrated here, we must resort to conjecture. There is every reason to think that Schlegel’s suggestion here is informed by an insight that emerged somewhat earlier within the Jena circle—first in Hölderlin’s fragment *Judgment and Being* (1795) and in the *Fichte-Studies* of Novalis (1795–1796), and only after these two texts, which would remain unpublished until the twentieth century, in Fichte’s own *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797–1798). Each of these authors came to see that the original self-consciousness underlying all objective representation cannot itself be described in representational terms on pain of infinite regress or circularity and hence defies conceptually articulated presentation.⁴⁰ This original self-consciousness is an act of pure spontaneity in which self-positing, being, and self-awareness coincide. Schlegel appears to suggest that this spontaneous act, which precedes and eludes philosophical reflection, nevertheless announces itself by confounding Kant’s arguments, diverting them from their intended course, such that they end up intimating a transcendent order that lies beyond intended meanings. As Schlegel writes in another note, Kant’s “confusion” exhibits an implicit order, a certain method in the madness that is not owed to intentional organization (“At least in [Kant] the confus[ion] is constructed in an order[ly] fashion; it is the first $\phi\sigma$ [philosophical] artistic $\chi\alpha$ [chaos].”⁴¹).

Such an interplay between confusion and order in a kind of “symmetrical” medley or *Kunstchaos* is, as the *Athenäum* fragment no. 389 appears to imply, the hallmark of enduring works in philosophy:

If every purely arbitrary or purely random connection of form and matter is grotesque, then philosophy has its grotesques as well as poetry; only it knows less about them and has not yet been able to find the key to its own esoteric history. There are works of philosophy that are a tissue of moral dissonances from which one could learn disorganization, or in which confusion is properly constructed and symmetrical. Many a philosophical artistic chaos [*Kunstchaos*] of this kind has had stability enough to outlast a Gothic church.⁴²

Schlegel’s syntax here does not make it entirely clear whether the works marked by “confusion” constitute a class distinct from works exhibiting “disorganization.” A distinction between the two, with a positive valorization of productive confusion as opposed to mere disorganization may be inferred from one of the notes on Kant: “Kant’s confusion is infinite in the genuine meaning of the word.—Fichte can still reach absolute disorganization.”⁴³ Unlike mere disorganization, then, what Schlegel calls “confusion” is to be understood not in privative terms but as the expression of a certain generative excess. The productive potential of such confusion is foregrounded in a striking stipulation: “Confusion is chaotic only when it can give rise to a new world.”⁴⁴ For a more nuanced exposition of this idea we may turn to one of the notes written by Schlegel’s friend and collaborator Novalis at a time when the two devoted considerable energies to studying Fichte:

The more confused a person is / confused people are called blockheads / the more he can make of himself by diligent self-study. On the other hand, orderly minds must strive to become true scholars—thorough encyclopedists. At first the confused ones must struggle with massive obstacles—they gain insight only slowly. They learn to work laboriously—but then they are lords and masters forever. The orderly person swiftly gains insight—but also loses it swiftly. He soon reaches the second stage—but usually stops there. For him it is the last steps that are laborious, and he can rarely succeed in placing himself in the position of a beginner again once he has attained a certain degree of mastery. Confusion points to an excess of strength and capacity—but deficient equilibrium—precision [*Bestimmtheit*]⁴⁵—to good equilibrium, but meager capacity and strength.

That is why the confused person is so progressive—so perfectible—and why on the other hand the orderly one comes to a halt so early as a Philistine.

Order and precision alone are not clarity [*Deutlichkeit*]. Through working on himself the confused person arrives at that heavenly transparency—at that self-illumi-

nation—which the orderly person so seldom attains.

True genius combines these extremes. It shares swiftness with the last and fullness with the first.⁴⁵

The link established in this fragment between confusion, the latency of order, and progressive perfectibility also helps to explain why the experience of incomprehension must remain central to a mode of reading conducive to independent thought. Far from being a defect, the confused character of a work is key to the sort of semantic plenitude (note Novalis's emphasis on "excess" in the passage just quoted) that sustains interest and elicits ever-renewed interpretive effort. It is as if Novalis and Schlegel had taken the rationalist doctrine that Kant had worked so hard to overcome, namely, the doctrine of the aesthetic as a realm of confused conceptual representation, and reinterpreted it in light of Kant's theory of the "aesthetic idea," a sensory representation so richly patterned as to elicit endless thought (5:313).

It would be self-contradictory to attempt a full clarification of such an all-encompassing idea of what Schlegel terms "confusion." Nonetheless, Schlegel's remarks on language in "On Incomprehensibility" do shed some light on the obscurities of Schlegel's and Novalis's remarks on confusion. Schlegel's manner of linking the question of language to that of unintelligibility is characteristically oblique and bewildering. In his feigned impatience "finally to put an end to all these understandable misunderstandings," Schlegel declares the need for a "real language," indeed a "Kabala," that might "bond chemically the holy, delicate, fleeting, airy, fragrant, and, as it were, imponderable thought."⁴⁶ Such a real language, whose first intimation Schlegel claims to have discerned in Kant's table of categories, would grant us the wish expressed in Schlegel's inaccurate quote from Goethe's *Faust*: "that we can stop rummaging about for words and pay attention to the power and source of all activity."

Of course the very act of quoting, not to mention the neatly consonant rhymes, subtly undermine this devaluation of words. The fantastic "real language" that Schlegel proposes as an alternative to words quickly turns out to be a figment of fancy. Schlegel's reference to rumors about the impending discovery of a method of making gold and his praise for "the objectivity of gold" issue in the mock-prophetic announcement that universal comprehension is about to be secured in the coming nineteenth century, when books will be written in bas relief, with golden letters on silver tablets. Language as a binding agent that absorbs meaning, as though meaning were some kind of volatile gas, language as a medium of monetary exchange—to say that these conceptions are to be

understood ironically is to state the obvious. With an abrupt rhetorical shift, Schlegel dismisses such speculations as chimerical. The small-minded notion of language as an indifferent instrument for the exchange of reified meanings is caricatured as the product of a stunted rationality that cannot see beyond economic and scientific calculation. Schlegel's send-up of the instrumentalist notion of language is thus part and parcel of the critique of modernity implied in the remark that his age "deserves the humble but highly suggestive name of the Critical Age, so that soon now everything is going to be criticized, except the age itself." Quickly proceeding to deflate the presumptions of an insufficiently self-reflexive modernity, Schlegel suggests that, even in this era of allegedly universal critique, the most sanguine hope that artists may harbor is that "humanity will at last rise up in a mass and learn to read." Whether this is a sarcastic comment on the perceived coarseness of the age or a reminder of the easily overlooked difficulties of reading is not a question that the reader of the essay should be determined to resolve at any cost.

At any rate, Schlegel's reflections on language in "On Incomprehensibility" are not limited to a dismissal of instrumentalist theories of language. The essay also advances a rival vision, one whose seriousness is intimated precisely through Schlegel's throwaway formulation:

I wanted to prove that all incomprehension is relative, and show how incomprehensible Garve, for example, is to me. I wanted to demonstrate that words often understand themselves better than do those who use them, wanted to point out that there must be a connection of some secret brotherhood among philosophical words that, like a host of spirits too soon aroused, bring everything into confusion in their writings and exert the invisible power of the World Spirit on even those who try to deny it. I wanted to show that the purest and most genuine incomprehension emanates precisely from that science and that art which by its very nature aims at comprehension and at making comprehensible, namely from philosophy and philology.⁴⁷

This passage situates the source of philosophically significant confusion in the autochthonous movement of language. It is, Schlegel suggests, the spontaneous self-organization of words that accounts for the nonintentional order or "inner construction" of certain theoretical works, by virtue of which they can stimulate endless thought in the reader. This vision of the autonomy of language converges with the one proposed in Novalis's *Monolog*, written two years earlier. As Novalis famously writes in that short text, language is "concerned only with itself," constituting a "world in itself" whose "play" is "self-sufficient," and whose "waywardness" ensures that we speak "the most splendid, original truths" pre-

cisely when we “speak for the sake of speaking.”⁴⁸ Touching on this aspect of early Romantic theorizing, Benjamin aptly writes of “the movement of concepts in their own medium” and argues that the primary “medium of reflection” for the early Romantics is language, not the individual mind.⁴⁹

To forestall an obvious objection, it is important to note that this way of thinking about language need not be taken to imply belief in its inhuman or divine character.⁵⁰ Schlegel’s remarks can be more fruitfully read along the lines developed by Michel Chaouli, namely, as attempts to acknowledge the fact that the formation of new linguistic meaning through the combination of syntagmatic elements (phonemes, word stems, words) is never fully amenable to intentional control, nor exhaustively describable in terms of formal laws.⁵¹ Because each syntagmatic element contains an opaque, quasi-material residue of historically deposited “intrinsic meaning,” as Chaouli puts it, iterated acts of combination tend to increase semantic polyvalence. What needs to be stressed here is that Schlegel’s core conception, so construed, does not presuppose the idea that these residues of intrinsic meaning, which prevent linguistic utterances from being reduced to fully reliable vehicles of subjective intention, have any mysterious source other than the depths of the collective human past (say, a divine intellect or a realm of Platonic ideas). Admittedly, the Schlegelian conception does not rule out theological or metaphysical speculation, and indeed many of Schlegel’s remarks on language gesture in that direction. To ask whether these tantalizing gestures are earnest or ironic would be a way of insisting on the question of subjective intention that Schlegel’s remarks so resolutely leave behind.

At first glance, Schlegel’s linguistic account of confusion may appear to be at odds with the previously suggested construal of the term along the lines of Novalis’s idea of a prereflexive ground of consciousness. According to that construal, our utterances tend to be confounded by irruptions of the foundational spontaneous activity that grounds and hence eludes reflexive self-consciousness. However, it is at the very least possible to connect these two perspectives on confusion, provided that we are ready to think of the capacity for syntagmatic combination and the prereflexive spontaneity underlying the thought “I=I” as two sides of the same coin. While such a claim is of course hardly uncontroversial, one may plausibly argue that the ability to combine linguistic elements presupposes the prereflexive self-awareness of the linguistic subject. The reverse relation is less obvious perhaps but no less plausible: even prereflexive self-consciousness, if it is to be more than mere animal sentience, can arise only in a creature endowed with a capacity for linguistic self-reference that is inseparable from the capacity for syntagmatic combination. Schlegel does not spell out this

connection, to be sure. My claim that his fragmentary remarks gesture toward an understanding of this connection is the product of a tentatively constructive interpretation, which is arguably just the mode of reading that Schlegel's mode of writing invites.

Against the backdrop of Schlegel's engagement with Fichte, his recourse to the metaphor of a secret society in the essay "On Incomprehensibility" is particularly resonant. We have come a long way, however, from Fichte's suggestion that the circle of those who can understand him constitutes something of a secret society when viewed from the standpoint of incomprehending outsiders. In the place of a brotherhood of men united by a letter that has become fully transparent toward the spirit, Schlegel posits a "secret brotherhood among philosophical words" that vitiates any attempt at anchoring communication in the transparency of language. This highly ironic deployment of the metaphor of an esoteric circle restores human universality, albeit in a negative sense, by suggesting a dimension of linguistic meaning in the face of which all humans are equally helpless and receptive.

As it should be clear by now, Schlegel shares with Fichte the view that the connection between the spirit and the letter is indeterminate and not fully amenable to intentional control. For Schlegel, however, spirit is no longer determined through binary opposition to the letter, as is the case in Fichte. Whereas Fichte deplores the poverty and unreliability of writing, Schlegel glorifies its excess. Words for him are not "dead letter," not sterile husks of a hibernated spirit awaiting to be reanimated through the reader's free mental activity, as Fichte believes. For Schlegel, words themselves are "a host of spirits," whose endless interconnectedness and uncontrollable self-movement manifests the "World Spirit" independently of the author's intention, and even in spite of it, by "bringing everything into confusion."

In the writing of an author who has not fully mastered the order of concepts—which is to say, in the writings of every finite human author—this sovereign order will assert itself according to its own laws, derailing any attempt at communicating a preconceived meaning to the point where the result is no longer decipherable in terms of an intention. Earlier I mentioned Schlegel's suggestion that transcendental philosophizing is prone to misunderstanding because it lacks appropriate linguistic articulation. At this point it should be obvious that the reason for this is not the poverty of language or its entrapment within the empirical domain. On the contrary, Schlegel appears to believe that language knows all too well everything that we might wish to know and often ends up saying far more than that. The type of confusion that attends on all but the most

banal linguistic utterances arises from this very excess, not from some putative failure of language to keep up with our audacious flights of thought.

If words understand themselves better than the person who uses them—if, that is, in using language the writer is under the sway of an understanding more powerful than his own—then there will always remain in every text, no matter how logically composed, no matter how painstakingly elucidated, a layer of meaning unmastered by the author which defies reduction to the speaker's intentions. Schlegel's remarks suggest that quotidian communication is sustained by a dimension of infinitely ramified meaning that always threatens to outstrip and vitiate the limited purposes of a particular utterance. Accordingly, in one of his notes from 1797, Schlegel writes, "[o]ne must be very intelligent in order not to understand certain things."⁵² Hence Schlegel's provocative admission in the essay "On Incomprehensibility" that he finds the *Populärphilosophie* of Garve incomprehensible. The surprising suggestion here seems to be that once we become attuned to the self-organization of words, even the platitudes of a third-rate thinker such as Garve may begin to intimate tantalizing depths.

This notion is further elaborated in the brief essay "On Form in Philosophy" with which Schlegel concluded the three-volume selection of Lessing's writings that he edited in 1804, and which was, significantly, dedicated to Fichte. In this essay, which shows clear signs of Schlegel's conservative Catholic turn, Schlegel seeks to mark out a form of communication that might supplement the solitude of the "productive method" of independent thought, while also protecting the latter from being profaned through all-too easy accessibility. Indeed it is no accident that Schlegel's essay invokes classic examples of esoteric philosophizing and condemns the tyranny of "unconditional publicity" brought about first by the Reformation and then by the French Revolution. Yet Schlegel's esotericism, unlike that of Fichte and Schelling, does not admit of the firm conviction that one is in possession of absolute insight. On the contrary, Schlegel asserts that all philosophy is "mystical" insofar as "the highest" remains "ineffable," "unthinkable," "the secret of all secrets." The form of its representation must do justice to its essential obscurity:

Despite the supreme clarity that dialectical works display in their particulars, at least the way in which the whole is tied together must point to something insoluble [*etwas unauflösliches*] if we are still to recognize it as a portrait [*Nachbildung*] of philosophizing or endless pondering; for form inheres only in that which signifies itself, where the form symbolically reflects the material.⁵³

At this juncture it is important to remain sensitive to Schlegel's wording. The "insoluble" conundrum results, according to Schlegel, from "the way in which

the whole is tied together.” Despite thoroughgoing changes in terminology, we can recognize here the idea that recurs in the notes on Kant and in the essay “On Incomprehensibility,” namely, that, rather than stemming from mere incoherence, incomprehensibility may bear witness to an extreme degree of coherence that defies discursive exposition. Faced with such works, interpretation should not try to penetrate an opaque surface but instead acknowledge obscurity as the essential feature of an elusive order. According to Schlegel, it is only by constructing confusion in this sense that interpretation becomes a philosophically productive exercise in independent thought.

CHARACTERIZATION

In the often quoted fragment no. 53 Friedrich Schlegel suggests that since it is “equally fatal for the mind to have a system and not to have one,” it may be necessary to combine the two stances.⁵⁴ This proposal is in keeping with Schlegel’s statements about the interplay between “confusion” and “construction” in the workings of the creative mind. The terms in which Schlegel describes that interplay are not exempt from it, however. If we examine the passages in which Schlegel writes of a confusion that invites constructive understanding, we find statements that are at odds with one another and cannot be subsumed under a unitary conception without a great deal of constructive effort.

Whereas many of these remarks derive confusion from a transcendent principle of linguistic self-organization that interferes with the author’s purposes, in other contexts Schlegel unmistakably anchors confusion in the individuality of an author. It is far from obvious whether these claims can be reconciled with one another or whether they belong to alternative lines of thought explored by Schlegel. To answer this question, I will first consider those remarks that emphasize the individual character of an author’s confusion. Up until now, this dimension has surfaced in my account only once, in the context of Novalis’s reflections on chaos and clarity, discussed in the previous section. Novalis describes an individual mind animated by a surfeit of conflicting forces, striving to distill this chaos through self-cultivation to an articulate order whose clarity surpasses that of mediocre minds. Schlegel too uses a similar, individuated notion of confusion in one of his posthumously published notes about Kant: “In order to understand someone one must first be smarter than he is, then equally smart, and then equally dumb. It is not enough that one understands the genuine meaning of a confused work better than the author himself did. One must also be able to know, *characterize* and *construe* the confusion itself

down to its very principles.”⁵⁵ This note anticipates one of Schlegel’s canonical statements on interpretation, the *Athenäum* fragment no. 401: “In order to understand someone who only partially understands himself, you first have to understand him completely and better than he himself does, but then only partially and precisely as much as he does himself.”⁵⁶ Several later commentators, and notably Gadamer, have suggested that this statement represents a turning point in the history of hermeneutics. Yet many of these commentators, Gadamer included, tend to read Schlegel’s fragment in light of the later, more full-fledged hermeneutic theory that Friedrich Schleiermacher would develop in his manuscripts and in the famous academy speeches given in 1829.⁵⁷ This approach is not entirely unfounded of course. Given the close collaboration between Schlegel and Schleiermacher between 1797 and 1799, the affinities between their conceptions are hardly surprising.

However, the relationship between the two theorists is easily oversimplified. A case in point is Gadamer’s influential discussion of romantic hermeneutics, which relegates Schlegel to a footnote.⁵⁸ According to Gadamer, Schlegel’s fragment marks the transition between two senses of “understanding an author better than he himself”: a move away from the Enlightenment ideal of *Sachkritik* (*objective critique*) toward the characteristically romantic brand of psychologism that Schleiermacher would develop into a full-blown theory. According to the ideal of *Sachkritik*, *better understanding* simply means a better, more internally consistent insight into the subject matter discussed by an author, an insight reached in abstraction from the author’s subjectivity. Kant, as I have shown in chapter 2, encouraged this type of better understanding with regard to the philosophical tradition, and his followers did not hesitate to approach Kant’s works with the same aspiration. Friedrich Schlegel’s call for better understanding still seems to be in line with this familiar construal of the principle.

With the requirement to “construct” the author’s confusion, however, Schlegel, as Gadamer construes him, enters the precarious terrain of subjectivism and thus paves the way for Schleiermacher’s grounding of philology in psychological interpretation. Gadamer underlines the historical importance of Schlegel’s statement: “We have reached here the precise point of transition between the universal significance of the statement as understood by the Enlightenment, and the new Romantic interpretation of it.”⁵⁹ This strain of romantic psychologism is highly “questionable” in Gadamer’s eyes. While he recognizes in romantic hermeneutics an anticipation of his own emphasis upon the productive power of interpretation, he charges that it encouraged an obsession with the author’s contingent personality at the expense of objective validity.

Upon closer inspection, however, Schlegel's statements do not warrant Gadamer's reproach.⁶⁰ To be sure, Gadamer is right in claiming that Schlegel's idea of better understanding introduces a perspective absent from Kant's and Fichte's universalistic construals of this principle. Indeed the way in which Schlegel specifies the task of understanding in his fragment ("to understand someone who only understands himself half-way") seems to reflect a preoccupation with the limited individual consciousness rather than an orientation toward some ultimate objective truth. There are, however, a number of reasons for thinking that Schlegel's concern with individuality cannot be conflated with the brand of psychologism usually attributed to Schleiermacher. What needs to be highlighted is, above all, Gadamer's failure to account for Schleiermacher's inversion of the temporal order in which *better understanding* and *understanding-just-as-well* follow one another according to Schlegel. Whereas Schlegel's fragment paradoxically calls for better understanding to take place *before* we can understand just as well, in Schleiermacher's theory reconstructive better understanding becomes possible only once we have achieved intuitive, "divinatory" identification with the author. To that extent, Schleiermacher's version is much closer than Schlegel's to the commonsense incremental view, according to which advanced levels of understanding must be preceded by inferior ones.⁶¹ This difference in sequence suggests that neither the notion of better understanding nor that of understanding-just-as-well carries the same meaning for Schlegel as it does for Schleiermacher.

Gadamer is misled into conflating the two conceptions partly because he assumes a static opposition between subjective origin and objective validity. That opposition, however, is foreign to Schlegel's thinking. This much should be obvious from the *Athenäum* fragment no. 22, which defines "projects" as emergent objects with a subjective origin and an objective character. A philosophical system is a project in just this sense; and if Fichte claimed that a person's choice of philosophical system is an expression of her character, Schlegel posits an even more intimate relationship of reciprocal illumination and dependence between the author's subjectivity and his system's claim to objective truth. As Schlegel writes in his 1797 discussion of Fichte: "For just as the most formal and abstract features especially in the practical philosophy of even the most eclectic writers are usually only representations of their individuality, so that which is apparently most personal in the utterances of the genuine idealist often gives profound insight into his system."⁶² It is, in fact, one of Schlegel's most striking suggestions that even a unique thought or system of thoughts must be treated for the purposes of understanding as an individual person. "I often marvel at

that," muses the autobiographical hero of Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*; "every idea and whatever else is formed within us seems perfect in itself, as unique and indivisible as a person. One idea supplants the other and what just now seemed near and immediate soon vanishes again into obscurity."⁶³ Indeed this very notion seems to startle Schlegel like some fantastic stranger materializing out of nowhere in front of him, eliciting a vague sense of disbelief. So he wonders in the *Athenäum* fragment no. 242:

Is it possible to characterize anything but individuals? Isn't whatever can't be multiplied beyond a certain given point just as much a historical entity as something that can no longer be divided? Aren't all systems individuals just as all individuals are systems at least in a germinal form and according to their tendency? Isn't every real entity historical? Aren't there individuals who contain within themselves whole systems of individuals?⁶⁴

Such passages put into question the philosophical platitude that the individual is that which eludes systematic thought, suggesting instead that thought as such, if it is to hold any interest, must deal in individualities. Again and again, Schlegel hints at the ultimate indifference of the individual (that which cannot be captured fully in universal terms) and the system (that which cannot be further expanded because its scope is universal). Counterintuitive though this linkage may seem, we can understand it as a hyperbolic inference drawn from the observation that the ideas that most powerfully engage the mind are precisely those that strike us with the novelty of an intriguing stranger. The same applies to the ideal that a work of art seeks to actualize: "Works whose ideal doesn't have as much living reality and, as it were, personality for the artist as does his mistress or his friend are best left unwritten. At any rate, they don't become works of art."⁶⁵ And it is the same conviction that underlies Schlegel's sweeping declaration: "If ideals don't have as much individuality for the thinker as the gods of antiquity do for the artist, then any concern with ideas is no more than a boring and laborious game of dice with hollow phrases, or, in the manner of the Chinese bonzes, a brooding intuition of one's own nose."⁶⁶ If thoughts and systems of thought are in some sense akin to persons, conversely, there is something of systematic significance in the sensibilities and patterns of thought peculiar to an individual. Schlegel's definition of criticism as the "philosophical purification and examination of history and the tradition" bears witness to his conviction that historical individuals are "at least in a germinal form and according to their tendency systems."⁶⁷ Accordingly, in his comments about the artistic employment of polemic, Schlegel asserts that there is something "petty" in

picking a fight with an individual and that one should either polemicize against “individuals who are classic and have eternally lasting merit” or at least raise one’s adversaries “as much as possible to the level of ideal prototypes of objective stupidity and objective foolishness.”⁶⁸

The same imperative of idealizing individuals underwrites Schlegel’s assertion that a key task of criticism is to “characterize” the author under examination. This notion may be seen as a corollary of the broader vision of art criticism whose Kantian provenance I highlighted toward the end of chapter 1—the idea that critique must be a potentiation of the work of art, the presentation of an antecedent act of presentation that continues the same movement from a subjective origin toward an objective character. Here is how Schlegel defines the task of characterization:

Nothing is more difficult than to reconstruct [*nachkonstruieren*], perceive, and characterize the thinking of another down to the finer peculiarities of his entire being . . . one [can] say that one understands a work or a mind only if one has reconstructed its progression and structure [*Gang und Gliederbau*]. Such thorough understanding, which is called characterization if it is expressed in definite words, is the real task and the inner essence of criticism.⁶⁹

The duality of “progression and structure” suggests a convergence between genetic representation and systematic comprehension, between developmental narrative and conceptual articulation. By virtue of this convergence, a critical characterization can bring out the general philosophical significance of an individual author or a particular work, combining evocation and elucidation. Conversely, it can complement an abstract conception with a genetic account of its emergence, with the “inner history of the concept.”⁷⁰ Critique—understood as “a middle term between history and philosophy”⁷¹—offers an ideal understanding of the particular object under scrutiny rather than an inventory of idiosyncrasies.

To characterize an author, then, is to grasp his works as constituting a “project” in the sense outlined in the *Athenäum* fragment no. 22—as an incipient object emerging from a subjective origin and moving toward an objective character.⁷² This requires going beyond what meets the eye in an author’s works and attending to their spirit as well—that is, to the absent dimension toward which they are gesturing, everything they *know* without saying or *will* without knowing. Instead of tracing features of the work back to subjective intentions, critical interpretation seeks to unfold the objective tendencies inscribed in the work and thereby continues its release from the limited particularity of the sub-

jective sphere.⁷³ This thought leads Schlegel back to the by now familiar hermeneutic principle: "Critique is actually nothing but comparison of the spirit and the letter of a work which is treated as something infinite, as an absolute and an individual.—To critique means to understand an author better than he understood himself."⁷⁴ It is worth taking seriously this linkage between better understanding and the critical completion of the work, for it actually throws light on the crucial issue overlooked by Gadamer, namely, the temporal order between the two hermeneutic moments in the *Athenäum* fragment nr. 401. More importantly, it helps us finally clarify the relation between Schlegel's derivation of confusion from a linguistic order that transcends human understanding and his recurrent emphasis on the individual character of confusion.

The *Athenäum* fragment no. 401 suggests that, by understanding the work as a project, the critic can tap into an immanent tendency toward objective insight that is latently operative in the author's self-understanding and more fully realized in the work itself. Why the work possesses a surplus of insight relative to the author's self-understanding may be clarified by recourse to Schlegel's reflections on language in "On Incomprehensibility." The key notion to recall here is that projects in the Schlegelian sense are realized in a linguistic medium whose interconnectedness and self-reflexivity exceed the grasp of any individual mind. For this reason, consideration of the work as a linguistic artifact allows the sensitive critic to recognize the author's self-understanding *as* a state of confusion in the face of the infinitely interconnected and self-reflexive order of language. Yet it also enables the critic to bring out the uniquely patterned, nonsystematically consistent form of bewilderment to which a given individual is prone in the face of that order. The author's ignorance or confusion, his erring from the absolute, thus become recognizable as effects of that same absolute, charged with a significance beyond psychological idiosyncrasies. It thus becomes possible to make sense of an author's characteristic patterns of confusion, not by appeal to banal psychological factors, but with a view to an elusive universal order. Through critical completion of the work, the critic achieves a standpoint from which the author's limited perspective can be reconstructed in philosophically significant terms.⁷⁵

The attainment of such insight would indeed justify the critic's claim to have understood an author both better than *and* just as well as he himself. Conceding that Lessing knew himself quite well, Schlegel nevertheless declares that Lessing could have never grasped his own individuality with the intuitive acumen and analytical rigor displayed in his own characterization of Lessing.⁷⁶ Schlegel's characterization brings out the way in which "the ideal and the con-

cept of the individual almost appear to blend into one" in the figure of Lessing, a convergence implied by laudatory phrases along the lines of "he is *a* Lessing."⁷⁷ Schlegel stresses that such systematic insight can be achieved without personal acquaintance with the author, by the sole means of immersion in his works.⁷⁸ It is thus clearly not a matter of empirical psychology, a discipline that Schlegel dismisses as a "philosophical grotesque."⁷⁹ As in the works of Kant and his followers, the devaluation of empirical psychology goes along with a critique of its abstractly conceived opposite, formal logic. Whereas Kant held that formal logic had to be supplemented with a transcendental logic because the former abstracted from the constitution of particular objects, Schlegel seems to think that criticism would remain abstract and formalistic if it couldn't account for the constitution of individual subjects. However, the individual dimension that criticism must disclose according to Schlegel is not an inner psychological reality that must somehow be empathetically guessed or intuitively divined, but a peculiar way of inhabiting language.

For Schlegel, unlike for Schleiermacher, the most illuminating account of an author's individuality can be reached through sustained engagement with her work, rather than the other way around. In the order of understanding, the work must take precedence before the author. As Schlegel puts the matter, "whoever understands *Nathan* right knows Lessing,"⁸⁰ but the inverse does not hold true. Although we can gain a systematic comprehension of Lessing's inimitable mind by reading his works, such understanding has, *pace* Gadamer, nothing to do with psychology in the empirical sense and everything to do with linguistic realization. In suggesting that the work throws light on the life and person of its author but not the other way around, Schlegel is closer to such writer-critics opposed to biographical interpretation as Marcel Proust and Walter Benjamin than to Schleiermacher.⁸¹ Schlegel's reflections outline a form of criticism that pursues its philosophical aspiration via a literary hermeneutics primarily focused on the work but sensitive to the linguistic dimension of the author's individuality.

What this might involve in reference to a particular act of reading can perhaps be brought out, in an eminently Schlegelian spirit, by invoking a critic's reflection on the work of another critic. I propose to illustrate the conception I attribute to Schlegel by reference to Umberto Eco's comments on Geoffrey Hartman's reading of the poem "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" by Wordsworth. In the passage of greatest interest here, Eco ponders the hermeneutic implications of Hartman's claim that a "funereal theme" is audible beneath the surface of the poem.⁸² That assertion crucially depends on Hartman's suggestion that Word-

sworth's use of the verse endings "fears," "years," "hears" makes the concluding word of the poem—"trees"—resonate with its absent anagrammatic counterpart "tears." Eco is quite right to emphasize that this is not a conjecture about Wordsworth's intentions. "If it is not the author, let us say," he proposes, "it is the language which has created this echo effect."⁸³ As Eco notes in his next lecture, however, this sort of interpretive appeal to the impersonal order of language can actually shed light upon the productive process that gave rise to the work, and it can do so without reliance on the type of psychological divination sanctioned by Schleiermacher. Eco writes:

Without being obliged to organize a seance and to press his or her fingers upon a jumping table, the reader can make the following conjecture: if a normal English-speaking human being is seduced by the semantic relationships between words *in praesentia* and words *in absentia*, why should not one suspect that even Wordsworth was unconsciously seduced by these possible echo-effects? I, the reader, do not attribute an explicit intention to Mr. Wordsworth; I only suspect that on the threshold situation where Mr. Wordsworth was no longer an empirical person and not yet a mere text, he obliged the words (or the words obliged him) to set up a possible series of associations.⁸⁴

As Eco makes clear, the topic of this speculation is neither the author as an empirical person nor the "model author" constructed by the reader, but a third thing, which Eco terms the "Liminal Author, or the Author on the Threshold—the threshold between the intention of a given human being and the linguistic intention displayed by a textual strategy."⁸⁵ In Schlegelian terms, we might say that by attending to the way in which the impersonal order of language is at work in the agency of the liminal author, we can understand the author better than he understood himself and indeed construct his confusion. In Wordsworth's being unconsciously "seduced" by a linguistic consonance, we can thus recognize the opening up of a dimension of meaning to which Wordsworth was acutely attuned without having conscious access to it. To say with Schlegel that better understanding must precede understanding-just-as-well is to acknowledge that we cannot notice and follow Wordsworth's "confusion" until close attention to his poem has enabled us to discern the transpersonal linguistic order that produced such confusion.

However, the Schlegelian concept entails the reverse claim as well. The transcendent order at work in language makes itself known only through an irruption of objectivity into the linguistic realization of a subjective intent; and insofar as that intention was formed by the author as a contingent individual, the impersonal, transcendent order of language must appear refracted through

that individuality. As a consequence, the critic cannot grasp the objective tendency of an author's project in abstraction from the forms of confusion peculiar to the author. This point too can be illustrated by Hartman's reading of Wordsworth. It is clear that Hartman's observation about the linguistic echo between "trees" and "tears" would be little more than a pun if it did not resonate with the unique conjunction of exposure to mortality and exposure to language that characterizes the author of such works as the Lucy poems and *The Prelude*. In relation to mortality as well as in relation to language, such exposure involves a lack of mastery—and, moreover, not just a lack of mastery in some general sense, which might encompass the "timidity" that Walter Benjamin sees as central to Hölderlin's poetry along with many other modalities of lyric receptivity, but a lack of mastery exhibiting an individual cast of mind that defies clear-cut conceptual definition.⁸⁶

Unless a critical reading remains sensitive to this highly individualized lack of mastery evident in the literary utterance, it cannot hope to bring out the ways in which the poem manifests a meaning that exceeds the author's conscious knowledge. For a succinct expression of this idea we may turn to an aphoristic formulation by Wordsworth's friend Coleridge, a statement whose resemblance to the *Athenäum* fragment no. 401 is hardly accidental: "until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding."⁸⁷ What this line of thought suggests vis-à-vis the two moments of the *Athenäum* fragment no. 401 should be clear by now. The achievement of understanding-just-as-well, then, is not merely a psychologistic addition to the feat of better understanding, as Gadamer's argument might suggest, but its proper completion and validation. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham recently put it, although critical interpretation must go beyond mere reconstruction of the author's conscious mind to "specify as far as possible the range and sensitivity of that mind"—a range defined by the potentially infinite responsiveness of human behavior to linguistic, social, economic, and ideological systems—such constructive activity must nevertheless submit to the "discipline imposed by another mind."⁸⁸

BETWEEN INSPIRED AND METHODICAL READING

In the model that emerges from Schlegel's statements, the author's sovereign creativity and the reader's spontaneity stand in a relationship of potentially antagonistic interdependence. On the one hand, the reader is transformed from a solid presence into a shadowy projection of the latter and indeed into a transcendental pedagogical project that awaits accomplishment in an indefinite

future. On the other hand, we have seen that this ideal reader is imagined as active in ways that undermine the writer's sovereignty. For the reader is invested with the power to construct an image of the author's individuality that is more significant and more comprehensively articulated than any self-understanding afforded to the author.

In describing this dynamic, Schlegel articulates a consequence of the hermeneutic circle that Umberto Eco termed "the dialectics [*sic*] between the rights of texts and the rights of their interpreters."⁸⁹ Eco offers the following incisive account of this dialectic:

A text is a device conceived in order to produce its model reader. I repeat that this reader is not the one who makes the "only right" conjecture. A text can foresee a model reader entitled to try infinite conjectures. The empirical reader is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of model reader postulated by the text. Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text. Thus, more than a parameter to use in order to validate the interpretation, the text is an object that the interpretation builds up in the course of the circular effort of validating itself on the basis of what it makes up as its result.⁹⁰

Clearly, the intention of the text to produce a certain kind of reader cannot be established by recourse to the empirical author's intentions. Eco is very clear on the point. If interpretation aims at "the discovery of a strategy intended to produce a model reader, conceived as the ideal counterpart of a model author," then the intentions of the empirical author have no place in that procedure.⁹¹ Yet this is not to sanction total disregard for the author as a person. For one thing, as Eco notes, if one wants to interpret a text, and not just use it, then one had better remain mindful of the author's "linguistic and cultural background," and it is surely impossible to bring that background into clear view without reference to the empirical author's life history and experiences.⁹² Furthermore, there undoubtedly exist texts whose strategy aims at the production of a type of model reader who seeks to get the empirical author's intentions right, even though such texts are not typically read under the rubric "literature." Finally, and most importantly for my purposes here, the Schlegelian way of bringing together linguistic confusion with the problem of individuality suggests that critical construction can, in fact, yield insight into the individuality of the author, not as an empirical person but as a figure on the threshold between subjective intention and linguistic objectivation.

However, the gap between the empirical author and the liminal author cannot be closed. The width of the gap between the two varies with the unstable

and potentially agonistic interplay between the author's projection of the model reader and the reader's construction of the model author. In his response to Eco's lectures, Richard Rorty identifies the extreme possibilities of that interplay. The first extreme is the type of *methodical* reading that robotically imposes the reader's preconceived agenda, leaving the work silenced and the reader essentially unchanged. The second extreme is *inspired* reading, in which the reader-critic is "enraptured or destabilized," and seized by a love or a loathing whose transformative power "makes a difference to the critic's conception of who she is, what she is good for, what she wants to do with herself: an encounter which has rearranged her priorities and purposes."⁹³

Taking up this distinction, I suggest that most, if not all, fruitful readings take place between the extreme poles of boundless susceptibility and violent appropriation. Much of the illumination produced by Schlegel's mercurial reflections on reading is due to his oscillation between the "synthetic writer's" claim to transform and indeed invent the reader and the opposing claim, made on behalf of the reader-critic, to construct the figure of the author. Through this very oscillation, Schlegel's remarks conjure up the regulative idea, as it were, of a mode of reading in which the constructive activity of the critic enhances (rather than stifles) the receptivity and the transformative potential of aesthetic experience. This is, I take it, what Michel Chaouli has in mind when he calls for a form of criticism that does not merely document a past experience of reading but serves as "an arena for developing the experience."⁹⁴

For an example of this sort of responsive engagement we may turn to one of the towering works of literary criticism, Walter Benjamin's essay "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (1924/25). The relevance of this example should be clear from the fact that Benjamin, whose dissertation dealt extensively with Schlegel, modeled his essay after Schlegel's piece on "On Goethe's Meister." Having noted the "unequalled disconcerting influence" that *Elective Affinities* has tended to exert on the feelings of its readers, Benjamin writes: "A turbid power, which in kindred spirits may rise to rapturous enthusiasm and in more remote spirits to sullen consternation, was always peculiar to this novel; only an incorruptible rationality, under whose protection the heart might abandon itself to the prodigious, magical beauty of this work, is able to cope with it."⁹⁵ In fact, Benjamin's appeal in the essay to the sublime authority of critical reason, which shatters the mystifying semblance engendered by the novel to uncover an elusive truth, does not merely contain the enchanting effect of the work's beauty but actually enhances it. In this manner, vigilant critical agency becomes inseparable from transformative surrender. Only a few years before Benjamin wrote his essay,

Thomas Mann gave an eloquent account of this sort of paradoxical conjunction in a meditation on Richard Wagner that continued Nietzsche's *love-hate*-fuelled preoccupation with Wagner. Broaching this vexing topic in his *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (1918), Mann defined "passion" as "devotion [*Hingabe*] together with knowledge" and had this to say about Wagner's art: "involvement with it almost becomes a vice, it becomes moral, it becomes a reckless ethical dedication to what is harmful and consuming when it is not naively enthusiastic but fused with an analysis whose most malicious insights are finally a form of glorification and again only the expression of passion."⁹⁶

Admittedly, Benjamin's reading of Goethe and Mann's engagement with Wagner are extreme in their exposure as well as in the intellectual exertion that they involve. For that very reason, however, these critical responses underscore a key lesson that has emerged from the interpretation of Schlegel developed in this chapter: if one's encounter with a work is to be fruitful, transformative reception and critical construction must reciprocally guide each other, each preventing the other from degenerating into its hermeneutically sterile extreme. This is possible only because the back-and-forth movement of the hermeneutic circle, in which conjectures concerning the model reader and hypotheses about the implied author undergo reciprocal adjustment, never fully erases its starting point. That starting point is the initial constellation of the work and the reader in a historically specific situation defined by tacitly shared interests, sensibilities, understandings, misunderstandings and puzzlements. Except for limiting cases, there is always at least a minimal degree of semantic determinacy in the work that restricts the range of viable hypotheses about its implied author and its model reader. On the other side of the dialectic, there is always at least a minimal degree of determinacy to the historically and linguistically mediated standpoint of the reader that constrains the range of intelligible conjectures about the strategy of the work. It is thus no more accurate to say that the reader is obliterated through her self-exposure to the play of textual effects than it is to say that writing entails a total self-surrender on the writer's part to the uncontrollable projections of future readers.⁹⁷ What seems right to say is that the partial and provisional abandon involved in literary communication allows both parties to conceive otherwise unavailable versions of their self-understanding.

5

EXOTERIC ENLIGHTENMENT IN HEGEL

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTICS

The account of Schlegel's response to Fichte given in the previous two chapters recalls the near-mythical twin figures of Socrates and Plato. Locked in a relation charged with enormous polarizing power, these two figures have retained an enduring fascination for theorists intent on making sense of the ancient legacies at work in modernity. Again and again, the temptation to play them out against each other would prove irresistible for later writers; thus Kierkegaard contrasted Plato's quest for pure theory with the lively personal engagement of Socrates, whereas Nietzsche held the vulgar rationalism of Socrates to be foreign to, or merely an ironic mask for, Plato's noble artistry.¹

For the purposes of illuminating the relation between Fichte's and Schlegel's views of authorship, the most suggestive attempt at putting this ancient duality to modern use is one that is unabashedly biased in favor of the Socratic paradigm. In an essay written in 1982, literary historian and theorist Hans Robert Jauss examines the relationship between Diderot's revival of Socratic dialogue in *Rameau's Nephew* (written sometime between 1761 and 1772 and first published in Goethe's translation in 1805) and Hegel's appropriation of that key text in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).² The argument of the essay turns on a contrast between the Socratic dialogism of the "advanced" Enlightenment, as exemplified by Diderot's text, and the Platonic dialectics characteristic of the

Enlightenment in its “accomplished” form, epitomized by Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Whereas the Socratic variant of the Enlightenment pitches a plurality of perspectives against one another in an antithetical manner and tends to end in aporetic suspense, the Platonic variant purports to say the last word by subordinating multiple voices to the monological authority of a purportedly scientific discourse.

Jauss is not alone among twentieth-century theorists in opposing Socratic practice to its Platonic appropriation, with a clear privileging of the former. His account of Socratic dialogism avowedly draws on the highly suggestive theory of the polyphonic word developed by Bakhtin, who in his posthumously published late notes also demarcated dialogism from monological dialectics and identified Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as a paradigmatic case of the latter.³ Likewise, Gadamer argues that Hegel’s dialectics converted the model inherited from Plato’s dialogues into a “splendid monologue.”⁴ Along similar lines, finally, Richard Rorty opposes the broadmindedness of “the informed dilettante, the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary between various discourses” in whose salon “hermetic thinkers are charmed out of their self-enclosed practices,” to the arrogance of “the Platonic philosopher-king who knows what everybody else is really doing whether they know it or not, because he knows about the ultimate context . . . within which they are doing it.”⁵

In the introduction to chapter 3, I mentioned that it is precisely this type of arrogant claim (attributed to the “monsieur le philosophe”) to understand others better than they understand themselves that provoked the resentful scorn of Rameau’s nephew in Diderot’s dialogue. Not incidentally, Diderot is one of the protagonists of the argument developed by Jauss, which locates the historical threshold separating Platonic dialectic from Socratic dialogism between Diderot’s dialogue and its Hegelian appropriation in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Based on the readings developed in the previous two chapters, however, we may complement Jauss’s story of the transition from Diderot’s Socratism to Hegel’s Platonism with a miniature counternarrative, restricted to just a few feverishly intense years within the period at issue. For it would be difficult to think of a more extreme manifestation of the type of monological practice that Jauss, Bakhtin, and Rorty concur in associating with Plato than Fichte’s Jena writings. Fichte’s struggles to work out a viable model of philosophical instruction underscore a problem endemic to his variant of the Enlightenment project, namely, that the notion of independent thought at its heart leaves little or no room for the receptivity required for the transmission of insights. The result is a relentlessly monological discourse. In a corresponding manner Schlegel’s writ-

ings may be thought of as gesturing toward a dialogical, Socratic alternative. Such a construal of Schlegel's response to Fichte may draw encouragement from Schlegel's well-known eulogies to Socratic irony as well as from his complaint about the monological character of Plato's dialogues.⁶

To be sure, the limits of this analogy should be clear from the reversal of the historical sequence in which the two models originally appeared on the scene. That sequence is of course hardly accidental, since it is only through Plato's writings that we know about the Socratic critique of writing. In Schlegel's response to Fichte, however, an emphatically "writerly" variation upon Socratic dialogism emerges as a corrective to a dialectic born of a deep mistrust toward writing. In both contexts, then, the privileging of orality gives way to an acceptance of writing. Yet whereas the Platonic espousal of writing allowed him to distill dialogical exchanges to a dialectics that becomes increasingly monological in Plato's later works, Schlegel's writings offer a dialogical alternative to the pedagogical impasse reached by a dialectics captive to the paradigm of orality. Thus, as we move from the ancient context to Jena in the 1790s, the alignment of the dichotomy between dialogue and dialectic with that between orality and writing is reversed.

An obvious reason for this reversal may be found in the emergence of philosophy as an academic discipline faced with the task of establishing itself as a rigorous science. This challenge facing Fichte goes some way toward explaining the combination of feigned orality with monological authority which is so characteristic of his writings.⁷ Conversely, it is only under cultural conditions where literature is already established as an autonomous domain of writing, printing, mass distribution, voracious extensive reading and contentious critical pluralism that writing can become the vehicle of open-ended dialogue, as is the case in Schlegel's works.

One may feel tempted to go beyond this observation and attempt to make sense of the reversal just noted in terms of a more fundamental gulf between antiquity and modernity. After all, the "absolute difference" between the two was a guiding axiom of Schlegel's thinking, just as the regulative idea of their "absolute identity" represented one of his highest aspirations.⁸ It hardly would be possible to develop such an account, however, without presupposing something like a speculative philosophy of history. Moreover, insofar as the categories of the Socratic and the Platonic have any heuristic value, we should bear in mind that the account given in the previous chapter of Schlegel's Socratic writerly response to Fichte's Platonic discourse was offered as a small-scale counternarrative to Jauss's more broadly conceived story about the way in which a

Socratic, dialogical version of the Enlightenment, as exemplified by Diderot, became appropriated and superseded in Hegel's Platonistic dialectic.

We do well, however, not to take Jauss's story at face value. In telling that story Jauss's sympathies lie squarely with Diderot's skeptically open-ended, Socratic variant of the Enlightenment. Accordingly, his characterization of Hegel echoes the well-known complaints lodged by Kierkegaard, Adorno, Gadamer and countless others about the relentlessly totalizing, closed character of Hegelian dialectics: "With the sublation of the dialectical form in the narrative discourse of the dialectic one loses not only the equilibrium between the opposing voices but also the openness of seeking and finding."⁹ There is, of course, a kernel of truth in that view. Hegel does unapologetically repudiate the Socratic understanding of philosophy as love of wisdom and clearly regards the Socratic knowledge of one's own ignorance as an ancient precursor to the Kantian claim about the insurmountable limits of human knowledge, which Hegel held to be self-stultifying.¹⁰ Hegel's contempt for the sort of impotent yearning which he sees as the flipside of Schlegelian irony stems in part from this suspicion of false modesty in matters of knowledge, or from what Hegel himself describes as a well-advised mistrust of mistrust.¹¹ Furthermore, and in a manner that would have infuriated Diderot's antihero as well as Diderot himself, Hegel undoubtedly thinks that his brand of speculative wisdom enables him to understand the standpoint of ordinary finite consciousness better than it could ever understand itself.¹²

There is nevertheless an important sense in which Hegel's project is closer to Schlegel's than to Fichte's, namely, in his rejection of philosophical esotericism. On that score, the purest representative of what Jauss, Bakhtin, and Rorty concur in subsuming under the rubric of Platonistic dialectics is not Hegel but Fichte, whose discourse categorically excludes those who have chosen heteronomy. In fact, the project of the *Phenomenology* was conceived in no small part to avert the impasse reached by Fichte. It is to this Hegelian alternative that I now propose to turn. My aim in doing so is to examine Hegel's solution to the issues that animated Schlegel's engagement with Fichtean idealism. This way of proceeding enables me to extend my story about the problem of cultural transmission in German idealism to the last major figure in that lineage.

LANGUAGE AS UNIVERSAL INFECTION

A mere few years before writing the *Phenomenology*, Hegel was still under the evident influence of the Fichtean-Schellingian view that speculative insight was something akin to intellectual intuition and that consequently one's capacity

or incapacity for such insight depended on one's moral character. Accordingly, the young Hegel concurred with Fichte that only few could ascend from the standpoint of ordinary consciousness to that of speculative insight. In his 1802 treatise *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel argued that Kant had reached only the threshold of speculative insight but failed to cross it. According to Hegel, Kant caught a glimpse of the speculative insight concerning the infinity of thought in the concluding step of the "Transcendental Deduction" and in the hypothetical idea of intellectual intuition outlined in §76–77 of the third *Critique*. If Kant had nevertheless stopped short of dropping the dichotomies based on his assumption of human finitude, this timidity was, so Hegel claimed, a function of Kant's personal character. Hegel thus described Kant's choice between a merely "reflective" philosophy of finitude and the speculative assertion of thought's infinitude in moralistic terms that harken back to Fichte's claim that one's choice of philosophy reflects one's character:

Kant has here before him both the Idea of a reason in which possibility and actuality are absolutely identical and its appearance as cognitive faculty wherein they are separated. In the experience of his thinking he finds both thoughts. However, in choosing [*in der Wahl*] between the two his nature [*seine Natur*] despised the necessity of thinking the Rational, of thinking an intuitive spontaneity and decided [*entschlossen*] without reservation for appearance.¹³

The claim that Kant's decision in favor of finitude was dictated by his "nature" does not sit well with the emphatic notion of freedom entailed by the speculative position. Nor is such a view compatible with the aspiration to make philosophical thought fully exoteric and amenable to complete discursive justification. It was Hegel's eventual repudiation of this view that led him to devise the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The pedagogical project of this work is defined by Hegel's conviction that the mere assertion of an inwardly felt certitude does not deserve to be recognized as the truth. Whatever the truth might be in substantive terms, it cannot be "the esoteric possession of a few individuals."¹⁴ This metaphilosophical premise necessitates a radical recasting of the absolute that philosophy is now tasked with articulating. That absolute is no longer an inwardly conceived act of thought but what Hegel calls Spirit: a concrete and freely self-determining plurality of subjects standing in relations of reciprocal recognition.¹⁵ Once the absolute is redefined in this way it no longer appears inconceivable that insight into its nature might become accessible to everyone.

Hegel's espousal of this exoteric vision of philosophy makes it incumbent upon him to chart an educational path by which every form of finite consciousness

might overcome its limitations and arrive at speculative wisdom. The aim of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as Hegel originally conceived it is precisely to show that each finite model of consciousness undermines itself, yielding a series of iterated self-corrections that ends in absolute knowledge. This goal is accomplished in the first half of the book. We thus learn that the mind is not adequately comprehended either as consciousness of being, or as self-conscious thought, or as the abstractly conceived rational principle of the identity of being and thought. Rather, all these aspects of mental life must be grasped as interdependent moments of the concrete and historically evolving absolute that is Spirit. However, precisely because Spirit is a fundamentally historical entity, the insight that the mind is Spirit would remain abstract and indeterminate without a historical account of how Spirit actually becomes what it is meant to be. Thus, in completing the original project of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel realized that his vindication of absolute knowledge had to go beyond a conceptual deduction of Spirit to include a historicized account of its development. This recognition led him to compose the second half of the *Phenomenology*, which first charts the educative formation or *Bildung* of Spirit in its substantial reality (in the eponymous chapter), then presents a parallel narrative of Spirit's historically changing self-conceptions (in the "Religion" chapter), and concludes with a figure of Spirit whose reality is determined by nothing other than its self-conception ("Absolute Knowing").

It is against the background of this undertaking to render speculative insight exoteric that I now propose to turn to a key passage in Hegel's discussion of Diderot. The passage I have in mind occurs in the middle section of the "Spirit" chapter, the section entitled "Culture: Self-Alienated Spirit." The term *Bildung* that A. V. Miller renders as "Culture" designates a stage in the history of Spirit where individuals can no longer take their immediate being as authoritative (as in Greek ethical life), nor simply define themselves in terms of abstract rights exercised in relation to an indifferent social reality (as in ancient Rome). Rather, in the world of culture, individuals must achieve a standing in a shared social world by negating their innate natural character and appropriating the right set of norms, commitments and dispositions.¹⁶ In an age of comprehensive culture, the charge that Hegel leveled against Kant in his earlier text—namely, that his "nature" had led him to "choose" dogmatism over speculative insight—acquires a new meaning. What it registers is no longer just a temperamental constraint but a more consequential failure to participate fully in a historical development that strips all such natural givens of normative authority.

In the section on *Bildung*, Hegel proposes a compelling account of how the Enlightenment is transmitted through the process of culture. Before turning to

the relevant passage, it is instructive to recall by way of contrast an assertion made by the young Schelling that I quoted in chapter 3. Similarly to the young Hegel's talk of Kant's dogmatic "choice," Schelling's declaration bears witness to the lingering influence of Fichte: "The medium through which spirits communicate with one another is not the surrounding air but the communal freedom whose reverberations extend to the innermost regions of the soul."¹⁷ Like every contrast, this one too works only on the basis of a presupposed analogy. Freedom is conceived of here as a ubiquitous and homogenous medium akin to air, though different from it, one that precedes language and in whose absence discourse is only a string of "vain words that remain unanswered by any sympathetic resonance (be it from its own or from another's bosom)," as Schelling puts it. The passage shows very clearly, then, what happens when the very intelligibility of transcendental-philosophical insight is thought to presuppose, rather than foster, the freedom of self-conscious thought on the reader's part. The consequence is, once again, an esoteric view of philosophical communication.

When Hegel sets out to describe the unstoppable spread of Enlightenment insight in a well-known passage in §545 of the *Phenomenology*, he first entertains a pneumatic analogy reminiscent of the one I just highlighted in Schelling. Hegel suggests that "the communication of pure insight is comparable to a calm expansion [*ruhige Ausdehnung*] or to the diffusion, say, of a perfume [*Duft*] in the unresisting atmosphere."¹⁸ Already in the next sentence, however, this metaphor gives way to an altogether different view of the propagation of insight, one that no longer carries the implication of inert materiality. In one of those memorable instances where Hegel's literary imagination overflows with a plethora of overdetermined associations, he launches into an extended medical metaphor that appears to evoke the unstoppable progression of syphilis:

It is a penetrating infection [*Ansteckung*] which does not make itself noticeable beforehand as something opposed to the indifferent element into which it insinuates itself, and therefore cannot be warded off. Only when the infection has become widespread is that consciousness, which unheedingly yielded to its influence, aware of it. For though the nature of what consciousness received into itself was simple and homogeneous with it, yet it was also the simplicity of an introreflected negativity which subsequently also develops, in keeping with its nature, into something opposed to it and thereby reminds consciousness of its previous state. This simplicity is the Notion, which is the simple knowing that knows itself and also its opposite, but knows this opposite to be reduced to a moment within it. Consequently, when consciousness does become aware of pure insight, the latter is already widespread; the struggle against it betrays the fact that infection has occurred. The struggle is too late,

and every remedy adopted only aggravates the disease, for it has laid hold of the marrow of spiritual life, viz. the Notion of consciousness, or the pure essence itself of consciousness. Therefore, too, there is no power in consciousness which could overcome the disease. Because this is present in the essence itself, its manifestations, while still isolated, can be suppressed and the superficial symptoms smothered. This is greatly to its advantage, for it does not now squander its power or show itself unworthy of its real nature, which is the case when it breaks out in symptoms and single eruptions antagonistic to the content of faith and to its connection with the reality of the world outside of it. Rather, being now an invisible and imperceptible Spirit, it infiltrates the noble parts through and through and soon has taken complete possession of all the vitals and members of the unconscious idol; then "one fine morning it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, and bang! crash! the idol lies on the floor."¹⁹

The embedded citation at the end of this passage is from *Rameau's Nephew*. Earlier in the chapter, an extended characterization of the nephew's divided consciousness prepared the dialectical transition to the notion of faith in a manner that suggested a crucial reason for the susceptibility of faith to the Enlightenment.²⁰ Succinctly put, the lesson of that transition was that faith and the Enlightenment were not independently existing adversaries. If the vortex of subversive reflection that animated the nephew's speech was an instance of the "pure insight" whose negative, all-dissolving movement is systematized in the Enlightenment, faith converts the very same restless movement of thought into a substantial thing-like being and projects it into a transcendent beyond. Put otherwise, faith is the positive counterpart of the negativity of the Enlightenment, an alienated, reified consciousness of the very same Spirit of which the Enlightenment is the (correspondingly one-sided) self-consciousness. Faith is thus defenseless in the face of the Enlightenment because, as Hegel writes, the latter only "makes valid [*geltend macht*] in faith what is necessary to faith itself and what faith possesses in itself."²¹ Conversely, Hegel's invocation at the end of §545 of the "new serpent of wisdom raised on high for adoration," a clear reference to Numbers 21:8, suggests that the Enlightenment program of destroying idols tends itself to relapse into idolatrous fanaticism. Indeed the essential continuity between faith and the Enlightenment is already intimated in the passage from Diderot's text that Hegel cites, for there the nephew compares the inevitable triumph of the natural trinity of truth, goodness and beauty to the bloodless triumph of the "foreign god" promulgated by Christian missionaries in China and India over the "idols" of the natives.²²

Yet this Hegelian variant of the dialectic of Enlightenment still does not explain Hegel's curious use of the metaphor of infection. Its historical sources,

to be sure, are not that difficult to establish. Somewhat later in the same section, Hegel follows Lessing in using the metaphor of infection to describe the way in which guardians of religious orthodoxy let themselves be seduced by the Enlightenment, with the result that they appeal to contingent historical facts to counter the subversive claims of historical Biblical criticism.²³ Moreover, throughout the late eighteenth century, writers often recurred to the concept of infection to express their anxiety about the novel challenges posed by modern sociability—and in particular by the “reading epidemic”—to the bourgeois will to individuation.²⁴

What is primarily at issue in Hegel’s use of the metaphor of infection is, however, neither the surreptitious erosion of theological dogma nor the contingent forms of moral, spiritual, or intellectual contagion that may or may not occur depending on the company one keeps and the novels one reads. What Hegel has in mind, rather, is a type of contagion that constitutes a necessary condition of participation in the life of Spirit: language. This may be inferred from two other key passages in the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel uses the term *Ansteckung* to describe the key role played by language in the movement of negativity by which Spirit achieves itself. In §508 Hegel writes:

Language, however, contains [the “I”] in its purity, it alone expresses the “I,” the “I” itself. This real existence of the “I” is, qua real existence, an objectivity which has in it the true nature of the “I.” The “I” is this particular “I” but equally the universal “I”; its manifesting is also at once the externalization and vanishing of this particular “I,” and as a result the “I” remains in its universality. The “I” that utters itself is heard or perceived; it is an infection [*Ansteckung*] in which it has immediately passed into unity with those for whom it is a real existence, and is a universal self-consciousness.²⁵

The metaphor recurs in Hegel’s remarks on the role of language in the art of Greek antiquity: “Just as the individual self-consciousness is immediately present in language, so it is also immediately present as a universal infection [*Ansteckung*]; the complete separation into independent selves is at the same time the fluidity and the universally communicated unity of the many selves; language is the soul existing as soul.”²⁶

The thought underlying Hegel’s talk of infection in these passages is anything but straightforward, yet it is crucial to understanding Hegel’s memorable account of the triumph of Enlightenment insight.²⁷ Here I can offer only a brief reconstruction. First, it is necessary to recall Hegel’s view that language use is a subspecies of action insofar as it too is a way in which consciousness alienates itself into something external over which it has limited control.²⁸ Through every

linguistic articulation of my self-consciousness I entrust myself to a medium of universal intelligibility and to that extent become another to myself. The instance of language use in which Hegel shows a particularly keen interest is, for obvious reasons, the first-person pronoun. When I use the pronoun “I” to refer to myself I tacitly recognize that concrete individual self as an instantiation of the universal form of subjectivity and thereby posit myself as identical with all the other “I”s who partake of that form. Not unlike an infection, the acquisition of the capacity for linguistic self-reference thus plants a germ of otherness within the natural individual and disrupts the complacency of his coincidence with himself.

Furthermore, that infection is transmitted to others, as it were, whenever I use language in a public setting to communicate my self-consciousness. By publicly employing the linguistic form of indexical self-reference I solicit members of my audience to perform the same movement of self-alienation that I have undergone. This is the linguistic power whose exercise Fichte made central to his brand of philosophical pedagogy, urging members of his audience to think the thought “I”—apparently without realizing that the use of this simple word also constitutes the most basic version of the “summons” that Fichte himself describes as the prompt to reciprocal recognition in his *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796–1797).

Hegel makes this connection fully clear. The conjunction between the speaker’s recognition of himself as a representative of universal subjectivity and the solicitation of others to enact the same self-recognition is the linguistic form of the sort of reciprocal recognition that sustains stable self-consciousness. It is through language use, then, that the subject passes over from the point-like isolation of individual selfhood into the continuum of Spirit as a recognitive community of self-conscious subjects.²⁹ Not unlike an epidemic participates in the process of life that maintains itself through the perpetual dissolution of the organisms that have differentiated themselves out of it, the life of self-conscious Spirit maintains itself through the fluidification of discrete subjects within the linguistic continuum.³⁰

The connection between life and language is not limited to this analogy, however. To grasp this connection we must first return to a crucial transition in the *Phenomenology* that I already touched upon in the introduction to this book, namely, the emergence at the end of the “Force and Understanding” chapter of the insight that consciousness is not bounded by some extraneous other but itself a movement of absolute difference and indeed infinity (“the distinguishing of what is not to be distinguished or the unity of what is distinguished”). Having

introduced this idea, in the opening section of the “Self-Consciousness” chapter Hegel makes the further point that the infinite movement of absolute difference cannot fail to become self-referential. Hence it “sunders itself into the antithesis of self-consciousness and life: the former is the unity *for which* the infinite unity of the difference is; the latter, however, is only this unity itself, so that it is not at the same time *for itself*.”³¹ Hegel clarifies the relation between the two by suggesting that, since the process of organic life is always governed by the concept of a genus (*Gattung*) instantiating itself in individual organisms, that process always bears a reference to the standpoint of an observer who can form such generic concepts and apply them in a self-conscious manner.³² What it means for that observer to be self-conscious is, moreover, that he does not simply coincide with his individual self but rather also recognizes himself as an instantiation of a genus, that is, as one of many subjects.

Three closely interrelated claims may be distilled out of these difficult passages. First, the type of distance to oneself which is the defining feature of self-consciousness can obtain only in the context of organic life. For, unless the structure of absolute difference already inheres in an entity as it exists “in itself,” it cannot become another to itself and still recognize itself in that otherness, which is to say that it cannot be “for itself.”³³ Second, self-consciousness is always consciousness of oneself *as* a living organism that belongs to a certain species, having certain biological features in common with other self-conscious organisms. Third, life is always implicitly or potentially self-conscious, even though an animal captive to mere instinctual appetite (*Begierde*) possesses only a nascent type of self-consciousness in the form of what Hegel calls “feeling of self.”³⁴

The last point raises the question of how some animal organisms actually became the self-conscious humans that we are. Hegel’s famous account of reciprocal recognition achieved through the “life-and-death struggle” and the subsequent master-slave dialectic cannot be construed as a historical answer to this question. As is the case throughout the “Consciousness,” “Self-Consciousness,” and “Reason” chapters, the dialectic developed in this key section is not a portrayal of concrete historical experiences. Rather, it is a transitory construct within Hegel’s highly abstract, meta-level model of the necessary progression linking the mind’s increasingly complex models of itself. Therefore, this dialectic of recognition cannot be invoked to answer anthropological questions about the emergence of self-consciousness on either the phylogenetic or the ontogenetic level.

What Hegel does offer us in the *Phenomenology* by way of an answer to such anthropological quandaries is, I want to suggest, precisely the conception

of language outlined in his remarks concerning the first-person pronoun as an “infection.”³⁵ For this idea suggests that self-consciousness (as opposed to mere sentience) can be said to have appeared in the midst of a species as soon as its members have developed sufficiently differentiated signaling capacities that each organism can refer to itself in first-person singular terms, to other members of the species in second and third-person terms, and to the species as a whole in first-person plural terms.³⁶ Accordingly, a newborn living organism becomes self-conscious by acquiring—or, to borrow Hegel’s metaphor, becoming “infected” with—a language of this type.

It is against the backdrop of this conception of language that we can begin to appreciate the central role of language in Hegel’s account of the dissemination of the Enlightenment. It now appears significant that Hegel goes on to quote a passage from Diderot’s text in which Rameau’s nephew predicts the inevitable triumph of the Italian musical idiom over the French one and, furthermore, emphasizes the difference between the national languages underlying the two musical idioms.³⁷ Not only is it the case, then, that the dialectic charted by Hegel actually takes place within the nephew’s bizarre discourse.³⁸ Rather, Hegel’s discussion also amplifies the way in which the nephew’s speech itself thematizes language.

Famously, the triumphant language of Italian music is characterized by the nephew in terms of naturalness and the Platonic-Christian “holy trinity of truth, goodness, and beauty.” Yet here one does well to heed Jauss’s thesis that the “hermeneutic difference” between Diderot’s text and its Hegelian appropriation is primarily due to a new question posed in the latter. As Jauss argues, Hegel transposes the “openness” that was merely a character trait in Diderot’s characterization of the nephew from the psychological register into one that is phenomenological in the specific Hegelian sense. No longer a positive trait, openness becomes a mark of negativity, or as Jauss puts it, the “expression of the truth of the self-alienated spirit as it is embodied in a consciousness of the conditions from which contemporary society suffers.”³⁹ In keeping with the all-important difference, noted by Jauss, of Hegel’s understanding of *Bildung* as estrangement from the more common notion of *Bildung* as organic evolution, Hegel converts the nephew’s openness from a natural trait into the mark of linguistically mediated self-estrangement.⁴⁰ One may extend the point made by Jauss to Hegel’s transformation of the linguistic theme in Diderot. For the nephew’s claim about the aesthetic integrity of a national language believed to be particularly close to nature gives way in the *Phenomenology* to a preoccupation with the negative, denaturalizing power of the language of *Bildung*, and indeed

of language as such. Accordingly, the nephew's characterization of the idiom of French opera as "monotonous" (rendered by Goethe in the German translation known to Hegel as *eintönig*) has no Hegelian equivalent in some kind of lament about the unnatural separation between truth, goodness, and beauty; rather, its closest recognizable echo occurs in Hegel's pejorative reference to the "monosyllabic" language (*Einsilbigkeit*) of the honest consciousness bent on preserving the natural simplicity of its commitment to the "true and the good" in the face of the dirempted, polyphonic speech of *Bildung*.⁴¹

When Hegel appropriates the nephew's prophesy about the inevitable triumph of the "foreign god" over the "indigenous idol," this forecast is based on his insight that the honest consciousness's monosyllabic assurances are powerless against the polyphonic language of diremption.⁴² That insight in turn is underwritten by Hegel's understanding of the infectious dynamic of language as the medium of Spirit—at least if I am right about the connection highlighted by Hegel's use of the term *Ansteckung*. In fact, already Hegel's antecedent comparison of the Enlightenment to the "calm expansion" (*Ausdehnung*) of a perfume establishes a subtle linkage to the topic of language. For the idea of expansion, and the related mathematical contrast between discrete punctuality and continuous expanse, will also play a key role in Hegel's climactic account of forgiveness, which foregrounds the power of language to sublimate the discrete individual consciousness into what Hegel calls the "indiscrete continuity" of reciprocal recognition, or "the existence of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality" (*das Dasein des zur Zweifheit ausgedehnten Ichs*).⁴³

Given the resonances among these seemingly disparate discussions within the *Phenomenology*, it becomes impossible to relegate Hegel's use of the terms *Ausdehnung* and *Ansteckung* in the passage about the dissemination of the Enlightenment to the status of fanciful metaphors. To be sure, we are dealing with metaphors here. Rather than serving a merely ornamental purpose, however, they convey a precise idea. It is the idea that the individual subject does not have the option of enclosing himself within a charmed circle of self-conscious thinking that the language of others must somehow penetrate from the outside. Rather, since our very being as self-conscious subjects is constituted by the negative power of language, we are always already susceptible to the language of others. As a consequence, not even the most dogmatically upstanding among us can make themselves entirely immune to the power of linguistically articulated thought to subvert entrenched certainties. This is why, before launching into his extended metaphor, Hegel goes as far as to suggest that nothing in the mind can hinder the movement of thought: "Whatever wedges of any sort may be driven

into consciousness, it is in itself this simplicity in which everything is dissolved, forgotten, and unbiased [*unbefangen*], and which therefore is absolutely receptive to the Notion."⁴⁴

THE VOICES OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY

This conception of language equips Hegel with a powerful way of explaining not only the process of individual formation but also the historical process by which the spiritual substance becomes estranged from its immediate being in order to become a self-conscious subject. Throughout Hegel's historical account, again and again language functions as the enabling medium of the self-formation of Spirit. Each stage in that process has its distinctive way of articulating itself in language: from the oracular pronouncements and literary genres of Greek antiquity and the emperor's commands in Rome; through the counsel and the flattery of the vassal in feudal society and the glorified but empty name of the absolute monarch; all the way to the monosyllabic death sentence pronounced by the revolutionary tribunal, the righteous attestations of conscience, the wicked agent's confession, and the word of absolution in which Spirit finally becomes absolute. It is within this series of linguistic registers that Hegel assigns a pivotal role to the rhapsodic, polyphonic speech in which the self-subverting movement of the cultivated consciousness articulates itself, epitomized by Diderot's portrayal of Rameau's nephew.

Of course Jauss does not deny the presence of these voices in Hegel's text. He recognizes that, insofar as Hegel aspires to revive Plato's dialectic in a form appropriate to modernity, his monological discourse can "also claim to have maintained the polyphony of the Socratic dialogue in a scientific investigation of the experience that consciousness has of itself."⁴⁵ In his response to Jauss, John H. Smith insists on this very point when he notes that, after all, the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia that inspired Jauss's reading was developed in the context of a theory of the novel and hence primarily dealt with narrative discourses that are strictly speaking monologic.⁴⁶ "Could one," asks Smith, "not read Hegel's apparent monologue of the Spirit precisely as a rich polemic, among various 'forms of consciousness?'"⁴⁷

In my view an answer in the affirmative would place too much strain on the frequently asserted analogy between the *Phenomenology* and the genre of the *Bildungsroman*; and in any event one might argue that the *Bildungsroman* is the least likely of novelistic subgenres to become a breeding ground for heteroglossia. As far as the *Phenomenology* is concerned, the forms of conscious-

ness and the corresponding linguistic registers that it traverses can hardly be thought of as constituting a polemic, arranged as they are in a putatively necessary sequence governed by the principle of determinate negation. Accordingly, the forms of language surveyed by Hegel are not simply juxtaposed or “dialogized from within,” as they would be in the sort of heteroglossic discourse which Bakhtin sees as the hallmark of novelistic writing. Rather, all these linguistic registers are thematized by and integrated into the speculative discourse of phenomenological observation. This discourse is indeed monological in the qualified sense that it aspires to the status of the one comprehensive *logos* that accounts for other ways of speaking and writing—or simply ignores them as irrelevant to its overarching purpose. That most contemporary readers can muster little sympathy for Hegel’s ambition to develop such a discourse is understandable. Nevertheless the conviction—evidently shared but never justified by Jausse—that such an ambition can only result in an oppressive form of totalization seems to mark the point at which enlightened toleration of plurality hardens into a dogmatic stipulation.

Careful consideration of the project of the *Phenomenology* shows, in fact, that the opposition between dialectic and dialogue cannot be upheld in the rigid form proposed by Jausse. It is a commonplace, after all, that Socratic dialogue is not quite as dialogical as it purports to be. Conversely, the unique *logos* of the *Phenomenology* is not as monologically deaf to its other as Jausse would have us believe. Indeed it cannot be, at least if it is to serve as an exoteric introduction to the indisputably monologic discourse of the *Science of Logic*. As a path of initiation into speculative insight, the phenomenological narrative aims at vindicating that insight before the tribunal of ordinary consciousness. Hence its discourse must still adapt itself to the dichotomies between subject and object, spontaneity and receptivity, that are taken for granted by ordinary consciousness and eventually overcome in the course of the *Phenomenology*. This explains the tension at the heart of the phenomenological project. On the one hand, Hegel claims that “all that is left for us to do is simply to look on” as consciousness performs its self-examination and self-correction.⁴⁸ On the other hand, as I noted in the introduction, Hegel claims that the dialectical necessity governing the transitions between the examined forms of consciousness obtains “behind the back” of consciousness itself and is grasped only by the observer who enjoys access to speculative insight.⁴⁹

In addition to the type of receptivity that is prescribed by the phenomenological method, however, a further moment of receptivity is introduced in the second half of the *Phenomenology*, which unfolds a historical account that goes

beyond Hegel's original conception of the book. The historical turn of the *Phenomenology* is necessitated by the conclusion reached at the end of the chapter on "Reason." Just as the "the true" cannot be mere being ("Consciousness" chapter) nor pure thought ("Self-Consciousness" chapter), it also cannot be grasped as the abstractly conceived identity of being and thought either ("Reason" chapter). Yet the failure of reason so understood has a positive yield as well: it gives rise to the insight that the true—that is, what there is in an absolute sense—is a concrete and historically evolved plurality of individual subjects that stand in relations of reciprocal recognition. Because this recognitive structure is characterized by a built-in striving for complete determination and comprehension of itself, in the "Spirit" chapter Hegel undertakes to reconstruct the historical process by which Spirit transforms itself from substance into subject. The process begins with the immediately given, nature-bound substantiality of Spirit in Greek ethical life and culminates in Hegel's time, when Spirit finally becomes a self-conscious subject. This historical development, as well as its philosophical reconstruction, is necessitated by the movement of self-estrangement that represents Hegel's secularized version of the Christian doctrine of kenosis: "the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of free contingent happening, intuiting [*anschauend*, "looking at"] its pure Self as Time outside of it."⁵⁰ This crucial passage near the very end of the *Phenomenology* suggests that Spirit cannot become absolute without becoming receptive to its own history.

Although Hegel uses a language of visual contemplation to articulate this idea, in the "Spirit" chapter the receptivity at issue takes the form of listening to historically specific forms of language use. Kojève is therefore quite right to call the author of the *Phenomenology* an "auditor-historian-philosopher."⁵¹ To be sure, just as the putative passivity of phenomenological observation actually involves a great deal of constructive activity, so Hegel's readiness to listen is a curious one, compatible with what Jauss calls a "sovereign disregard for all the rules governing the use of quotations."⁵² A particularly glaring sign of this disregard is what appears to be a considered refusal on Hegel's part to name the authors whose positions he is rehearsing and subverting at any given point, regardless of whether the author discussed at a given point is easily identifiable or obscure. If, however, this practice undoubtedly reflects an extraordinary claim to sovereignty, it also represents the dialectical flipside of Hegel's effacement of his own individuality. In other words, Hegel's disregard for the conventional rules of citation and his self-surrender to the linguistic continuum of Spirit stem from the same deference to a viewpoint that is both trans-individual and self-individuating.

There is a further, related, point that must be observed by way of qualifying, if not entirely contradicting, Jauss's thesis about the monological character of Hegel's discourse. In the minutes of the 1983 Berkeley colloquium on his essay, Jauss suggests that "Hegel's notion of *Bildung* as work, of appropriation, is directed upon the otherness of the real, of the material world of history, not directed upon the otherness of people."⁵³ Whether understood in the specific context of the chapter on *Bildung* or with respect to *Bildung* as the narrative principle of the *Phenomenology* in its entirety, this assertion is based on a spurious distinction. By the time subjects enter the realm of *Bildung*, the material nature that precedes societal practices has become emptied of normative authority. To that extent, the otherness upon which *Bildung* is directed is precisely that of other people, including the institutions, beliefs, and rules produced by other peoples' agency. And the otherness of other people is not something that Hegel can be accused of taking lightly, as witnessed by his definition of Spirit as "the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I.'"⁵⁴

Accordingly, none of the linguistic registers that the *Phenomenology* traverses can be ascribed to a unitary, self-identical standpoint. Each of these linguistic forms spans a distance opened up by Spirit's movement of self-recognition through estrangement. Perhaps nowhere does the necessity of this estrangement become clearer than in the crucial moment of reconciliation that finally renders Spirit absolute, the word of forgiveness concluding the section on "Conscience."⁵⁵ For the word of absolution can come about only as a belated, because initially withheld, response reciprocating the confession of the "wicked" agent. That word cannot be uttered until a chasm of rejection has opened up between, on the one hand, the wicked agent whose conscience drove him into the guilty particularity of action and, on the other, the hard-hearted judge who insists on the pure and passive universality of conscience. For the judge must first self-righteously refuse the wicked agent's confession before he can recognize the identity-in-difference between his own puristic adherence to universality and the agent's lapse into particularity.

Nor is the opposition of these two perspectives a merely transient moment resulting in undifferentiated univocity. The absolute knowledge attained at the end of the *Phenomenology* does not call for the passivity of beatific contemplation but actually burdens Spirit with the obligation to "start afresh to bring itself to maturity as if, for it, all that preceded were lost and it had learned nothing from the experience of the earlier Spirits."⁵⁶ This idea of a fresh start that must

be ventured “on a higher level,” as Hegel puts it, clearly anticipates the *Science of Logic*. And although that discipline is no longer overtly dialogical, Hegel himself will write about its subject matter that “the idea possesses within itself also the most stubborn opposition; its repose consists in the security and certainty with which it eternally creates and eternally overcomes the opposition, in it meeting with itself.”⁵⁷ The nature of the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* remains a notoriously vexed issue of Hegel scholarship, complicated by changes in Hegel’s view of the over-all structure of his project. Yet regardless of how one construes that relation, it is crucial to Hegel’s enterprise that it must include an exoteric demonstration of its first principle.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the work in which Hegel discharges that task, cannot bypass a multiplicity of voices defined by relations of solicitation and response. There is thus an important sense in which, *pace* Jauss, the discourse of the *Phenomenology* very much conforms to the etymological meaning of *dia-logos* (“discourse across” or “discourse between”).⁵⁸ Not only does Hegel’s conception of linguistically mediated *Bildung* enable him to wrest himself free from the sort of esotericism that entrapped Fichte’s discourse in a monological mode; it also offers a strikingly rich and suggestive account of the way in which the spontaneity of the mind is bound up with its receptivity. To be sure, that to which Hegel’s Spirit must remain receptive is not some putative mind-independent reality in its raw givenness but the linguistically mediated historical world into which Spirit has externalized itself and across which its movement freely propagates.

CONCLUSION: THE AFTERLIFE OF A DISTINCTION

A GLANCE BACK AND A QUESTION

In an important recent book, Eckart Förster has argued that German idealism can be seen as a unified development that began with Kant's claim to have inaugurated philosophy proper in 1781 and concluded with Hegel's possibly even more grandiose claim to have ended philosophy a mere twenty-five years later.¹ Whatever one may think about these two declarations or the historical linkage between them, it is important to recognize that their authors were operating with markedly different conceptions of philosophy. Kant claimed to have founded a discipline governed by timeless principles of reason. Hegel, by contrast, was convinced that his work completed the course of an essentially historical form of inquiry.

The preceding chapters charted a transformation that partly accounts for this expansion of philosophical thinking, and whose significance cannot be limited to the discipline of philosophy. Kant's conception of human mindedness may be called atomistic in the sense that its point of departure is the individual subject equipped with a fixed inventory of faculties. Although it is crucial to Kant's account that one of the cognitive faculties is receptive, the receptivity in question is correlated with an atemporal noumenal realm and hence does not have a history. Taste, the domain of pure yet purely subjective feeling, is the sole, albeit systematically central, normative dimension in which historical

models play something approaching a constitutive role according to Kant. It is the reception of Kant's critical work by his successors that moves questions of cultural transmission squarely into the forefront of philosophical attention. One of the reasons for this is no doubt that the later idealists' engagement with Kant involves a particularly complex and consequential case of reception, one that invites sustained reflection on what it means to receive another's thought. Equally importantly, however, in Fichte's works this engagement gives rise to a way of thinking about mental activity that does not only call into doubt the very possibility of Fichte's reception of Kant but indeed threatens to rule out all communication in any philosophically weighty sense.

Intent on averting such esotericism, both Friedrich Schlegel and Hegel develop models of the absolute that emphasize the linguistic constitution of mental activity and its dependence on cultural transmission. This broad similarity should not obscure the fact, however, that Hegel's philosophical absolute is premised on a deep-seated hostility toward what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy termed "the literary absolute" envisioned by Friedrich Schlegel. For whereas Schlegel's experimentation with dialogical forms of writing is motivated by strong reservations about Fichtean idealism and a return of sorts to the Kantian acknowledgment of human finitude, Hegel's dialectical conception of the absolute represents the most radical repudiation imaginable of the finite standpoint. Accordingly, the two authors give sharply different accounts of receptivity to the language of others—and indeed of the very sense in which others can be said to be other than me.

In view of this divergence, it is all the more remarkable that key ideas developed by both authors regarding the dynamics of culture move between the poles of receptivity and spontaneity, continuing a line of questioning that originates in the works of Kant and Fichte. This observation about the heuristic power of the distinction at the heart of the preceding chapters prompts the final question that I will now take up by way of concluding my study. Much of Western philosophical thinking since Kant has been driven by the ambition to overcome dichotomies attributed to such diverse sources as Plato, the Judeo-Christian legacy, and Descartes. The basic opposition of receptivity and spontaneity would appear to be one of these dichotomies from which thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein struggled to disentangle themselves. One might justifiably wonder, then, whether we still have any use for this opposition.

MCDOWELL ON SECOND NATURE

In attempting to answer this question we could do worse than turn to one of the most widely discussed philosophical works of the past two decades, John McDowell's 1994 book *Mind and World*. McDowell's book has become paradigmatic for the rapprochement between two disciplinary cultures within philosophy that are still customarily identified by the increasingly vague labels "analytic" and "continental." Although the starting point of *Mind and World* is formulated in the fairly narrow terms of contemporary epistemology, the solution proposed in the book encompasses an uncommon range of topics and sources. Spanning the trajectory of German idealist thought, the argument of *Mind and World* begins with the Kantian dichotomy of receptivity and spontaneity and attempts to settle the resultant problems by recourse to Hegelian insights. Yet even though McDowell suggests that his book might be read "as a prolegomenon to a reading of the *Phenomenology*," it would be a mistake to treat it as a primer to Hegel for analytic philosophers.² With great ingenuity, McDowell reframes the German idealist legacy in light of Platonic and Aristotelian themes on the one hand, and Wittgenstein's and Gadamer's urgings to change, or indeed altogether drop, the agenda of philosophy, on the other.

The historical sweep of McDowell's argument is not incidental to its substance. His line of thought renders robust the linkage between the epistemological concerns of German idealism and the problematic of cultural transmission. It is because McDowell develops this linkage in a manner that is sensitively historicized but never merely of historical interest that engaging with his book can help us formulate an answer, however tentative, to the question concerning the relevance of the Kantian distinction to current-day thinking about the dynamics of culture.

The question that prompts McDowell's reflections is how rational thought can be responsive to the deliverances of our sensibility. As McDowell observes, earlier attempts at resolving this difficulty have tended to result in an oscillation between two equally unpalatable options. One of the poles of this movement is the "myth of the given" identified by Wilfrid Sellars, according to which rational beliefs are somehow caused by the world's impingements on our senses. Following in the footsteps of Sellars, McDowell rejects this notion on the grounds that it "offers exculpations where we wanted justifications."³ Put simply, the cause of one's having a certain belief is not yet a reason to commit oneself to that belief. The other pole of the oscillation described by McDowell consists in the view that a belief can be justified only by another belief and hence sensory episodes

exert merely a causal influence, but no genuinely rational constraint, upon our thinking. This position is epitomized by the coherentism of Donald Davidson. In a way reminiscent of Schiller's comparison of Fichtean idealism to a solitary ball game, McDowell contends that coherentism robs rational thought of answerability to experience and thereby relegates it to a "frictionless spinning in a void." Crucially for McDowell's argument, both coherentism and the myth of the given carry metaphysical implications. Whereas the myth of the given tends to overemphasize the naturalness of the embodied human being at the cost of denying the freedom of rational thought, coherentism pushes us in the direction of a Cartesian dualism that leaves thought divorced from the natural world. Unable to explain how the spontaneity of thought might work together with sensory receptivity, both conceptions leave us with utterly dissatisfying pictures of the mind's place in the world, and the inevitable breakdown of each makes us seek refuge in the other.

For an alternative to this unprofitable movement McDowell turns to Kant's epistemology, which holds the promise of a reconciliation between the claims of sensibility and the dictates of rational thought—yet only the promise of it. Similarly to Hegel, McDowell thinks that Kant failed to make good on this promise, and he also concurs with Hegel in finding Kant's failure instructive. As we may recall from the introductory chapter, Hegel held that the Transcendental Deduction failed because Kant was too timid to break with a typically modern, "reflective" mode of philosophizing that clung to dogmatically assumed dichotomies. For Hegel this failure underlined the need for a "speculative" type of philosophy that radicalizes the Kantian critique by refusing to presuppose anything whatsoever apart from the ultimate knowability of the Absolute. Along broadly similar lines, although with important differences, McDowell argues that Kant's Transcendental Deduction fails because Kant cannot extricate himself from a misbegotten dichotomy between the spontaneity of thought and the receptivity of the senses.⁴

Yet McDowell's diagnosis of the fallacy responsible for Kant's failure deviates from Hegel's in an important way. According to McDowell, Kant's attempt foundered because his basic dichotomy was rooted in the same self-defeating metaphysics that keeps engendering the twin aporiae of the myth of the given and coherentism. The metaphysical view at issue is a result of what Max Weber famously called the "disenchantment of the world," a process driven by secularization and the rise of the natural sciences in Early Modernity. This process opened up a gulf between two logical spaces. The logical space of nature is the realm of meaningless happenings described by the exceptionless causal laws of modern natural science. The logical space of reasons, by contrast, is the nor-

matively structured realm of free, spontaneous thought that is responsive to purposes, meanings, justifications, and warrants.

Once the space of nature is opposed to the space of reasons in this manner, it becomes exceedingly difficult to make sense of the conjunction within human life between the rational mind and the material body. And it is precisely the mind-body problem, as it has come to be known, that underlies the quandary about knowledge that compels the unpalatable choice between the myth of the given and coherentism. When we rely on our bodily senses to take in data about the world, this sort of receptivity can be described in neurological, chemical, and physical terms. But if the logical space of nature is defined in rigid opposition to the logical space of reasons, then these natural transactions with objects must be thought of as taking place outside the logical space of reasons and hence cannot serve as justifications for rational beliefs. So long as our openness to the world is understood in terms of the world's causal impingements on our bodily senses, a perplexity will persist as to how our thinking is answerable to the tribunal of experience.

Faced with this impasse, McDowell recommends a therapeutic response inspired by Wittgenstein's undertaking to "give philosophy peace."⁵ Instead of attempting to solve the problem, McDowell undertakes to dissolve it. The specter of a perplexity requiring a constructive solution can be exorcised if the puzzlement is shown to have arisen from a dubious premise. The key premise that McDowell singles out for criticism is the reductive equation of nature with the space of nature, or otherwise put, the view that the natural sciences can in principle tell us everything we need to know about nature in general and human nature in particular. McDowell does not, to be sure, set out to refute this widespread view. Rather, his point is that nothing recommends it apart from dogmatic confidence in the unlimited reach of scientific explanation.⁶ Given the groundlessness of dogmatic scientism, McDowell recommends a simple-sounding default position that refuses to be mystified by the human condition. Instead of starting out with a rigid dichotomy between the naturalistic and the normative picture of our place in the world and then attempting to construct a theory that somehow integrates the two dimensions of our lives, we should recognize that their conjunction is a pre-theoretical given. It is a feature of our form of life that precedes all explanatory projects undertaken within that form of life, an inescapable presupposition of all theoretical pursuits that necessarily eludes theoretical reconstruction.

To accept this is to reject the restriction of the concept of nature to what belongs in the logical space of nature as opposed to the logical space of rea-

sons. What this means is that nature is to be understood more broadly than the domain describable in terms of natural science. This is not to deny that the natural sciences can help us explain and master nature; but—so one might put the thought that appears to underlie McDowell's proposal—they can do so only because nature is the arena of all those purposive comportments and practical concerns that form the pre-theoretical background against which scientific descriptions and predictions matter to us in the first place. Strikingly, McDowell suggests that this expansion of the concept of nature to include not only causal laws but meanings as well amounts to a “partial re-enchantment of nature.”⁷

Admittedly, this talk of re-enchantment seems somewhat misleading when one considers that the aim of McDowell's Wittgensteinian therapy is to make us decline the age-old philosophical invitation to be astonished. It is nevertheless to two terms inherited from the philosophical tradition that McDowell reaches back in elucidating his enlarged notion of nature. The first concept is that of second nature descended from Aristotle's ethics. The second is the concept of *Bildung* (variously translated as “formation,” “education,” or “culture”) central to a German idealism and classicism, whose Kantian variant was already broached in chapter 1. In reviving these twin notions McDowell's thought is a simple one—deceptively so, because for all its simplicity the thought in question cannot be accommodated within a modern framework until the scientistic fallacy is remedied. It is the thought that the type of responsiveness to reasons which constitutes spontaneity is a feature of the form of life characteristic of human animals, acquired through a socio-culturally mediated process of formation. For it is a central fact about our natural constitution that we become viable organisms only through initiation into a set of historically evolved conceptual capacities, and in particular, through the acquisition of a language. Culture is thus natural to humans. As philosophical anthropologist Helmut Plessner put it, the human being is characterized by a “natural artificiality.”⁸

By refusing to treat this basic condition as a mystery requiring further explanation, we can come to see the capacity to act and think in conformity with rational norms as culturally transmitted and, insofar as culture is second nature, anchored in nature (understood in the enlarged, nonscientistic sense). On this view, it is no longer necessary to conceive of our responsiveness to norms as an extraneous addition to the first nature described by biology. Rather, our norm-governed second nature can be seen as an orientation that infuses all aspects of our way of life as sense-making, reason-giving, linguistic animals. Far from capturing some sort of essential, rock-bottom truth about us, the image of the human that restricts itself to quantifiable data, bracketing normativity, is a

mere abstraction necessitated by the limited purposes of scientific investigation. When we seek to make philosophical sense of our lives it makes more sense to think of the human organism as a life form whose sensory capacities are imbued with conceptual norms.

This means that we no longer need to worry about how our raw sensory awareness of the world's impingements might be taken up in conceptual thought so as to justify rational beliefs. Sensible receptivity to the world is not a form of pure passivity but a stance informed by the same conceptual norms that guide judgment and agency.⁹ If, moreover, our capacity to make norm-governed judgments about the world is already implicated in our sensory openness to the world, then we must revise accordingly our idea of what the senses take in. What the senses take in is not physical objects impinging on them but intelligible states of affairs, "that things are thus and so . . . the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge."¹⁰ As McDowell pointedly puts it, "we do not accept unitary material objects; we accept, say, that we are confronted by them."¹¹ Echoing Wittgenstein's famous assertion in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that "the world is everything that is the case," McDowell proposes that we conceive of the world "not . . . as a totality of the describable things—zebras and so forth—that there are (as we say) in it, but as, precisely, everything that can be truly thought or said: not everything we would *think about* if we thought truly, but everything we would *think*."¹²

If that to which we are receptive in experience is not inert things that lie outside the ambit of spontaneous thought but intelligible states of affairs, then it is possible, after all, to salvage the receptivity of experience without recourse to the idea of a raw given. It thus becomes possible to think of the mind as being in contact with the world without having to assume that such contact has to be achieved through the bridging of a gulf between two originally separate domains. Remarkably, McDowell suggests that this therapeutic conception achieves the same "equipoise between subjective and objective" also found in Hegel's absolute idealism, which holds that the forms of thought and the structure of the world are reciprocally defined in terms of one another.¹³

For the purposes of my argument the most suggestive aspect of McDowell's project is the attempt to do justice to the culturally transmitted character of our norms without thereby relativizing their binding status. According to McDowell, vindicating the autonomy of reason does not require that we construe our conceptual norms as products of an occult power that lies outside the natural world accessible to the bodily senses. This sort of "rampant Platonism" can be avoided if we bear in mind that norms are culturally transmitted and as such integral to

our natural endowment (provided that *natural* is understood in a broad sense encompassing second nature). If we follow McDowell in rejecting dogmatic scientism, then no constructive theorizing is needed to justify this default view.

Crucially, McDowell claims that this view does not undercut the Enlightenment principle mandating free critical reflection on inherited norms. This claim is of obvious interest in the present context, for it holds out the promise of reconciliation between the authority of cultural models and the spontaneity of thought. In order to keep this prospect open, McDowell must take great pains to distinguish his relatively modest conception of spontaneity from the considerably stronger, constructivist thesis that we bestow authority on norms through acts of self-legislation.¹⁴ It is this demarcation that I want to bring into sharper focus now.

Although McDowell grants that basic norms emerge historically within human communities, he denies that any individual or community can be intelligibly thought of as bestowing authority on them. Although our basic norms are the results of free acts, “the intentional content of the acts did not include making those rules binding.” Hence, as McDowell puts it, “it is not that someone did it, but we do not know who, because the bestowing is lost in the mist of prehistory. No one did it.”¹⁵ McDowell’s opposition to an overly strong construal of the idea of self-legislation stems from the elementary insight that thinkers cannot institute the very norms that constitute thought in the first place. To insist on this point, however, is not to relapse into a precritical Platonism that projects the norms of thought into some supernatural mind-independent realm. On the “naturalized Platonism” that McDowell wants to defend, we are subject to a norm only insofar as we freely acknowledge its authority; however, to acknowledge a norm in this sense is not to bestow authority upon it. The problem with the latter idea is that it presumes that we could entertain the norm in question from the neutral standpoint of an external observer who subsequently endorses or rejects it. However, it is a characteristic feature of our most fundamental norms that their meaning is intelligible only from within a way of thinking for which such norms are already authoritative.¹⁶ Once we adopt such an internal standpoint, there is no room left for treating the authority of the norms that define that standpoint as dependent on our acts of endorsement. As far as the status of such basic norms is concerned, the only coherent thought available to us is that they are not up to us but valid anyway, irrespective of whether we actually recognize their validity.¹⁷

McDowell’s subtle brand of naturalized Platonism thus allows him to acknowledge the culturally mediated character of our most fundamental norms,

while also enabling him to rule out the type of relativism that would follow if we were free to take up a noncommittal stance toward such norms.¹⁸ The freedom involved in the spontaneity of thought cannot mean that we are free to retreat to a neutral standpoint to reflect on the validity of the norms handed down to us. Every act of reflection by which we reject or ratify a candidate norm is itself underwritten by a preexisting normative orientation, which is, in turn, also open to reflective scrutiny, and so on in a potentially infinite regress. To the extent that there is no such thing as a presuppositionless critical stance, each time we submit an inherited norm to critical examination we must take at least a minimal set of evaluative principles for granted, principles that we have inherited in one way or another. Thus, although every inherited norm to which we might appeal is subject to spontaneous acknowledgment and critical examination, it is equally true that there is no exercise of spontaneity that does not presuppose a moment of receptivity toward some sort of tradition.

It is worth noting here that McDowell's way of thinking about the connection between spontaneity and cultural transmission also informs the complex attitude that he adopts with respect to the German idealist legacy. In particular, this perspective can help make sense of an otherwise puzzling feature of McDowell's appropriation of Hegel, the key precursor whom he credits with having worked his way out of the impasse of traditional epistemology. As I mentioned earlier, McDowell assimilates the Hegelian overcoming of epistemological worries to the later Wittgenstein's effort to salvage commonsense realism from hypochondriacal anxieties about the possibility of knowledge. To a great extent, this assimilation is justified. For a plausible gloss on Hegel's startling assertion that "the Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute," we may indeed turn to the following Wittgensteinian "platitude" offered by McDowell: "There is no way to conceive reality except in terms of what is the case, and there is no intelligible idea of what is the case except one that coincides with the idea of what can be truly thought to be the case."¹⁹ In that Wittgensteinian vein, McDowell claims that it is Kant's "half-hearted" dualism, and not Hegel's "whole-hearted" notion of absolute knowing, that flies in the face of commonsense realism.²⁰

It is surely not an irrelevant observation, however, that this way of framing the Hegelian position is opposed to the way Hegel himself saw what he was doing.²¹ Although it is not entirely wrong to describe Hegel's intentions as therapeutic, there is surely nothing quietistic about the therapy prescribed by him. For that therapy requires us to buy into a highly non-obvious and in many ways unsettling conception of mindedness, evident in Hegel's talk of "absolute difference," "pure negativity," and Spirit being "by itself in another." Speculative ideal-

ism is indeed an unabashedly revisionary enterprise that asserts philosophy's mandate to take leave of common sense. By rejecting the law of non-contradiction, Hegelian speculation harnesses the restless energy of negation.²² Although McDowell's quietism has obvious affinities with Hegel's critique of self-defeating metaphysical dogmas, Hegel would be the last to deny that his speculative conception is just as foreign to common sense as are the dogmatic precursors that it purports to supplant.

There is a second, related, way in which McDowell's project is at odds with Hegel's, which is ultimately more important for the purposes of the present discussion. In view of Hegel's claim to have overcome the Kantian dichotomies, McDowell's revival of Hegel would seem to authorize the same radical step. Could it be, one might ask, that the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity is an artificial and misguided one after all, the most basic perhaps of all the fruitless dichotomies that have continued to vex modern philosophy? If indeed a therapeutic partial re-enchantment of nature permits us to recover a kind of commonsense confidence in the power of spontaneity to infuse our sensibility—if, that is, we no longer need to think of spontaneity as an isolable addition to the sensible receptivity that we share with animals—then it might seem that the distinction between our animal receptivity and the human capacity for spontaneous thought no longer performs any meaningful conceptual work. Remarkably, however, McDowell stops short of recommending that we simply drop that distinction. Although he does not explicitly justify his retention of the receptivity-spontaneity distinction, his guarded conservatism in this regard can hardly be a matter of inconsistency. In what follows, I want to propose a line of thought in support of McDowell's terminological conservatism, one that also yields a more general lesson regarding the status of that distinction in the context of contemporary reflection.

THE LAST DISTINCTION

A suitable starting point for this line of thought can be found in a passage from 2006 in which McDowell displays a clear awareness of the issue just raised:

It may be tempting to protest that if the idealism I am envisaging is supposed to coincide with common sense, we may as well stick with common sense. But as soon as we are alert to the way rational animals are marked out as special by their potential for self-determination, we need to acknowledge that our rationality enters into the possibility of describing ourselves as accepting what our senses give us. As I said, such

locutions do not fit just any creature whose senses inform it of things. And idealism is to the point in explaining how such locutions work—how our senses provide something for us to accept, in such a way that, in the ideal case, we directly take in part of the objective world.²³

McDowell is here taking up a central ideal of Western thought whose most influential formulations include the myth of Prometheus as told in Plato's *Protagoras* and Pico della Mirandola's *Oration On the Dignity of Man*. It is the idea that humans are an exception within nature insofar as their natural endowment underdetermines their orientation in the world, imposing upon them the arduous but lofty task of determining the shape of their lives through the free exercise of reason. In Renaissance humanism this idea was still anchored in a theological conception. Pico della Mirandola, for instance, held that God's creation would not be complete without an indeterminate creature that, having no nature of its own, is free to appreciate the perfection of every other creature.²⁴ Once, however, the idea of humans' exceptional status is deprived of its theological underpinnings, the conjunction of the peculiarly human freedom of rational thought with the sensible receptivity shared with animals is bound to appear striking and cannot be described in a nondichotomous way.

It is not immediately clear how pertinent this consideration can remain, however, once we heed McDowell's call to decline the invitation to be astonished at the human condition. The sober view that there is nothing mysterious about the rationality of the human animal also enjoys the support of modern evolutionary theory, which offers a view of human nature as continuous with the animal kingdom. Indeed the theory of evolution would seem to offer a powerful framework for thinking about why and how language—and therewith the first germs of normativity—may be assumed to have emerged in the midst of the animal kingdom. Evolutionary selection is thus seen by many to hold the key to a purely naturalistic account of norms, one that would seem to undercut any conceptually sharp distinction between receptivity and spontaneity.

It is not possible, in my view, to counter this type of reductionism without establishing a key point that McDowell himself refrains from pressing.²⁵ When the natural-scientific approach is applied to human nature itself it reaches a limit, one that is constitutive and hence should not be lamented as an avoidable limitation. In short, what the findings of science cannot establish is the authority of science itself. Insofar as scientific inquiry already presupposes that certain epistemic norms are authoritative for us, it cannot be burdened with the task of grounding the validity of those norms in the first place. Invoking

empirical observations about natural entities to establish that observation can in fact disclose the structures of the natural world would be a question-begging procedure. Similarly, the theory of evolution, confined as it is to nonteleological, causal explanation, can offer a highly informative descriptive account—given from the external standpoint of a disengaged theorist—of how certain groups of primates might have gained an evolutionary advantage through the invention of such norms as rationality, truth, or morality. What a strictly causal “just so” story about our natural history by definition cannot provide—however illuminating such a story may otherwise be—is reasons for commitment to such basic norms, including norms that trump biological needs. In other words, an evolutionary account cannot validate the internal perspective upon human life, the standpoint of beings who take themselves to be both animal organisms and normatively oriented truth-seeking thinkers. Because the claims of evolutionary theory are supposed to be true, and because their authority depends on the epistemic reliability of our experiential access to nature, the theory of evolution already presupposes, and hence cannot justify, the view of ourselves as animals capable of various normative orientations (such as those that underpin the truth-seeking practices of natural science).²⁶

The point can be generalized. If constructive theorizing is taken to be a mode of inquiry that seeks to justify a certain view by recourse to more basic knowable facts, without presupposing what is being justified, then it is not possible to give a constructive theory of humans’ capacity for knowledge. However richly informed by natural-scientific knowledge, constructive theorizing cannot help us explain the conjunction between the receptivity that we share with animals and our capacity for spontaneous thought in conformity with rational norms. In other words, we cannot expect theoretical reflection to replace the duality of sensible receptivity and spontaneous thought with a seamlessly unified account of the mind’s place in the world.

This line of thought provides as compelling a reply as we could wish for to evolutionary challenges to the humanistic justification for maintaining the spontaneity-receptivity distinction. Even as it answers such challenges, however, the argument just outlined implies an even more fundamental difficulty. Since it applies to all constructive theories, not just evolutionary ones, the argument threatens to undercut all theorizing and thus to mandate, once again, a return to common sense. Even if we grant this argument about the limits of natural science, then, McDowell’s somewhat perfunctory invocation of humanism still does not fully answer our original question: Why engage in the first place in a type of reflection that engenders such troublesome dichotomies as the one

between receptivity and spontaneity? Couldn't we use the ancient wisdom of Plato and Aristotle, bolstered by Wittgenstein's diagnosis of modern philosophy, to recover a kind of pre-theoretical common sense?

Intent on resisting the lure of constructive theory in thinking about the conjunction of human nature and normativity, the farthest McDowell wants to go is to say that the terms of idealism can help in clarifying our seemingly contradictory ways of speaking about the rational animal ("how such locutions work"). Yet, arguably, few readers of *Mind and World* would be ready to accept the claim that its argument is limited to the task of elucidating language games. And there are good substantive reasons to go beyond that comparatively modest task, for the tensions between the ways in which we talk about humans qua rational beings and the ways in which we talk about them qua animals cannot be adequately addressed by attending to matters of language use alone. Even if one does not agree with the criticism that (contrary to McDowell's repeated disavowals) *Mind and World* is a work of constructive philosophy, still it would be difficult to dispute that the book performs a work of theoretical reflection in attempting to come to terms with that tension.²⁷ Yet, McDowell does not clarify what this type of theoretical reflection has to offer above and beyond common sense.

To answer this question, it is necessary to shift our focus from natural history to history proper, and specifically to the role of modernity. Although McDowell's diagnosis of key accounts of knowledge explicitly foregrounds their modern character, in a less obvious but equally central sense, his own therapeutic undertaking is also informed by the conditions of modernity.²⁸ This is so not only because his recourse to Plato and Aristotle may be seen as the latest in a lineage of attempts—undertaken variously by Hölderlin, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger—to revive ancient Greek legacies in hopes of loosening the iron grip of an overly restrictive modern conception of reason. More important still in the present context is the fact that McDowell's thinking cannot escape a characteristically modern dynamic of self-undermining or self-overcoming.²⁹

Let me outline the variant of this dynamic that I take to be directly relevant to McDowell's undertaking and which also speaks to the persistence of the Kantian distinction. As embodied natural beings we are born into a historically specific situation, growing up in which we appropriate certain culturally inherited models and norms. An important, if not the most important, norm that modern Western subjects acquire through their formation into rational citizens concerns the proper stance toward normativity itself. We become sensitive to the demand not to take anything for granted and to submit inherited norms to the test of

reason, that is, to use our capacity for spontaneous thought. Although enlightened modernity lays claim to universal validity, it is nevertheless the product of a particular tradition whose survival depends on the transmission of certain culturally specific ways of talking and thinking as opposed to others. There is thus a duality of universality and particularity at the heart of the secular modern outlook, which becomes all the more acutely felt under conditions of accelerating historical change and increased exposure to other cultures.

As a consequence of this duality, there is a lingering tension between our sense of indebtedness to a particular tradition, which requires a measure of continued openness to what is alive in it, and the culturally transmitted demand to submit all inherited commitments to rational examination. Reflection on the grounds of our commitments (or on the absence of such grounds, as the case might be) is a task imposed by participation in a culture that mandates comprehensive critique.³⁰ By necessity, the accomplishment of that task can itself only be a culturally situated process. Our assessment of a particular candidate norm would have to proceed without a criterion if it could not rely on some other norm that is simply accepted and therefore exempted from scrutiny, if only in a provisional manner. The process of learning by which we first acquire our most fundamental norms, the ones that constitute our very capacity for spontaneity, cannot even begin without a certain degree of receptive openness. It is by letting themselves be initiated into a natural language, suffused with the interests, valuations, discriminations, and assumptions of a concrete community at a specific historical juncture, that children become subjects capable of critical thought in the first place. That process is fundamentally receptive and not something over which the individual can exert full reflective control.

To be sure, as "light dawns gradually over the whole" of a culture's landscape of concepts (to borrow a suggestive Wittgensteinian image), the developing mind may reach a point at which it becomes capable of critically reflecting upon candidate norms.³¹ Moreover, subsequently to the appropriation of a given norm one may still come to question its soundness, suspend commitment to it, and adopt a noncommittal standpoint toward the norm in question as one searches for its justification. To do so, however, one must once again presuppose some normative criterion, which then has to be kept, at least provisionally, beyond the reach of critical interrogation. As McDowell insists, invoking Otto Neurath's well-known image of a sailor who must overhaul his ship while it is afloat, "one can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about;" and hence "even a thought that transforms a tradition must be rooted in the tradition that it transforms."³² If, then, we are never purely receptive or purely

spontaneous in relating to objects, the same applies to our relation to the tradition as well.

What this means can be rendered more precise by means of a comparison to Hegel's thinking about the process through which modern humans develop reflective distance vis-à-vis the immediate certainties of their sociocultural situation and thus become capable of consciously made, free commitments. This is the educational process that Hegel describes under the rubric of *Bildung*. Although McDowell shows little interest in this dimension of Hegel's thinking, it is nevertheless a crucial feature of Hegel's account that the self-estrangement of *Bildung* must eventually give way to, and is indeed a necessary precondition for, a form of life that is fully reconciled with itself.³³ What Hegel envisions when he uses the phrase "absolute Spirit" is a shared framework of intelligibility within which the commitments made by individuals no longer appear as contingent upon the vagaries of natural temperament and life history but rather can be recognized as necessary moments of universal Spirit.³⁴ Owing to this recognition, enabled by the backward glance of "comprehended history," human acts and products no longer have the aspect of being determined by brute facts that lie outside the movement of conceptual thought. In other words, the utterances of earlier humans and the documents of other cultures cease to confront us as foreign givens that we must first take in and then actively order in terms of our imposed concepts. Rather, all our sense-making engagements with other minds and (seemingly) other forms of mindedness become internalized to the movement of self-differentiation and self-recognition that constitutes Spirit. Hegelian reconciliation is thus a state in which we can recognize ourselves in these other forms of mindedness and recognize them in ourselves, such that there is a sense in which they are, to borrow a formulation used in another context by Bernard Williams, "not alternatives *to* us; they are alternatives *for* us."³⁵ According to this speculative understanding of history, the spontaneity that we possess by virtue of our participation in Spirit's movement toward self-recognition is inseparably bound up with our receptivity toward the estranged, historically particularized formations of Spirit.

Given the dismal historical experiences that testify to humans' deep-seated resistance to the claims of a universal "we," and in view of the growing evidence that nature cannot be relegated to a moment of Spirit, the prospects for such a reconciliation now appear much dimmer than they did in Hegel's time. So long as Hegelian absolute knowledge remains unattained, however, even the most reflective and broad-minded individual will lack the cognitive resources that would be needed to fully sublimate the contingencies of birth, natural circum-

stance, and social conditioning. Such a sublation will then remain impossible because the universality into which historical contingencies would have to be sublated is simply not there, or it only exists as a formalistic idea (of, say, logical consistency or procedural rationality) that requires us to abstract from such contingencies.

Since McDowell's account does not point beyond the basic situation just described, it must do without the Hegelian idea of speculative reconciliation. This much should be clear from McDowell's remarks to the effect that the reflective self-scrutiny of our outlook cannot rule out parochialism and bad prejudice and that the outcome of every effort to mitigate such defects can only be "provisional and inconclusive," subject to indefinite refinement.³⁶ However, these acknowledgments on McDowell's part have the status of marginal reminders that merely qualify, but do not significantly perturb or complicate, the basic quietism of his outlook. They fail to convey the full extent of McDowell's departure from Hegel and sidestep an intractable problem.

As Bill Bristow has pointed out, McDowell's account glosses over the tension that obtains between the broadly Aristotelian (and tendentially elitist) idea of *Bildung*, understood as the acquisition of a second nature through initiation into a tradition, and the Enlightenment (Kantian) imperative of critical reflection, whose thrust is directed against the authority of particular traditions.³⁷ McDowell's reminders that the proper exercise of our rational second nature involves a standing obligation to subject our norms to reflective scrutiny hardly suffice to alleviate this tension. For the idea that we acquire our capacity for reflective scrutiny through an unreflective process of initiation entails that our reflection can never fully extricate itself from the contingencies of our particular situation and hence cannot attain to the sort of unconditionality and universality stipulated by the Enlightenment.

Hegel's conception of *Bildung* is not vulnerable to this objection. Having reached his mature position through the recognition that the Enlightenment project of rational justification could not simply be dismissed in the name of an esoterically conceived absolute, Hegel expounds in the *Phenomenology* a notion of *Bildung* that aspires to meet the consequent theoretical challenge. This conception is, as Bristow convincingly argues, actually antithetical to McDowell's. For Hegel, *Bildung* is precisely *not* unreflective initiation into second nature but, rather, the "cancellation" of both first and second nature through reflective appropriation and internalization of the tradition.³⁸ In Hegelian parlance, whereas McDowell's notion of *Bildung* is restricted to the process through which we become participants of spiritual substance in the first place,

Hegel uses that term to describe the negative movement through which spiritual substance becomes a self-conscious subject.

The idea that spiritual substance becomes a self-conscious spiritual subject through the mediation of self-estrangement bears an obvious index to the telos of absolute knowledge. Less obvious but equally important, this idea presupposes the speculative understanding of negation at the heart of Hegel's dialectics. Once these twin premises are abandoned, it is difficult to see how the concept of *Bildung* might help us reconcile the Enlightenment demand for reflective justification with acknowledgment of the historicity of our norms. We are then left with the situation that emerges from McDowell's argument, a situation whose problematic character McDowell himself does not properly acknowledge. Without the prospect of absolute knowledge, *Bildung* can only have the meaning of unreflective initiation, a process with respect to which critical reflection will tend to have a disruptive effect.

This means that we remain subject to an ongoing alternation between receptive reliance and critical self-awareness vis-à-vis culturally transmitted norms. The relation between the two stances cannot be stabilized on the level of individual consciousness; for, as we have seen, such a stabilization would require nothing less than the sort of collectively achieved reconciliation that Hegel had in mind. Consequently, our alternation between the two stances is fraught with hesitancy and tends to prompt meta-level awareness, frustrating any desire for naïve identification. This is, I submit, the reason why we do not have the option of returning to the sort of common-sense trust in our second nature that precedes any distinction between spontaneity and receptivity. The disruptions to which common sense remains prone tend to elicit a type of reflective awareness that precludes seeing spontaneity and receptivity vis-à-vis transmitted norms as flip sides of the same coin and requires us to see them as alternative stances toward any given inherited norm or model. The only conceivable alternative to this unstable form of consciousness would be Hegelian absolute knowledge.

The impossibility of stabilizing the oscillation between spontaneity and receptivity in our attitude vis-à-vis cultural traditions cannot fail to show up in the range of attitudes that we may adopt toward the various theoretical options that are historically available to us. Thus the fact that McDowell, his crucial deviation from Hegel notwithstanding, still emphasizes the Hegelian inspiration of his argument, may be seen as a particularly telling instance of the tension between indebtedness to an inherited model and the license to reconstruct precursor models with a view to markedly different present-day concerns. Nor is Hegel's thinking immune to this tension, for that matter. The starting point of

the pedagogical path charted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is determined by the insight that a speculative philosophy aimed at overcoming the dichotomies of the epistemological tradition cannot vindicate—nor even fully articulate—itsself without at least provisionally accepting those distinctions, if only to show their self-cancelling character.³⁹ Indeed Hegel's phenomenological critique of finite consciousness is immanent to the latter in a further, related sense as well, namely, insofar as its method has to be described in terms of the finite opposition between conceptually guided construal and passive “looking on.”

McDowell's critique of the philosophical tradition is immanent to its object in a different sense. Because McDowell does not rely on Hegel's teleological assumption that consciousness is inherently self-correcting, he cannot employ the dialectical procedure of letting the criticized position subvert itself. Instead he opts for a procedure of exorcism inspired by the later Wittgenstein, the underlying logic of which resembles that of medical immunization. To gain protection against the ailments besetting the philosophical tradition we must first succumb to them: we must experience the anxiety induced by the incompatibility of our self-understanding as free rational thinkers with modern naturalism and thereby expose ourselves to the temptation to extrude reasons and meanings into an extranatural Platonic realm to salvage spontaneity. This impulse cannot be grasped unless its power is first experienced. Trying to repress the impulse by adhering to a deflationary picture of ourselves as particularly versatile animals would be tantamount to stopping philosophy “before it begins,” as McDowell aptly puts it.⁴⁰ Yet if McDowell urges us to begin philosophy precisely in order not to become mired in it, he also cautions against construing the Wittgensteinian idea of “stopping philosophy” as a dream of definitive immunity. The affliction is bound to recur.⁴¹ Our only option, then, is to begin philosophy anew each time the impulse arises, to reflect on the pressures to which we find ourselves subject whenever we thus begin, and to take care not to cross the line on the far side of which lurks the specter of constructive philosophy.

It should be clear that this strategy precludes sovereign aloofness toward, or detached disinterest in, the tradition. It demands respect for the precursors who were in the grip of epistemological quandaries and, as McDowell notes, appreciation for the “real insight” operative in “seeming to be faced” with them.⁴² Since we cannot loosen the grip of inherited ways of thinking without first exposing ourselves to their appeal, the activity of critical scrutiny must be combined with a certain charitable openness toward, and indeed provisional assent to, the standpoint that we seek to overcome. If the idealist reception of Kant's theory of spontaneity showed that theory subject to the very same principle of

better understanding that it underwrote, conversely the imperative of receptivity toward the philosophical tradition disallows fully assimilating the receptive side of our mental life to its spontaneous side. Unless we can wholeheartedly endorse the Hegelian program of “sublating” (*aufheben*, in the sense of canceling and preserving) the philosophical tradition from within, we must continue to regard receptivity and spontaneity as distinct aspects of our mental life—even or especially as we resist the temptation to turn this duality into a rigid dichotomy or an outright dualism. Even a therapeutic response to the characteristically modern rigidification of the spontaneity-receptivity distinction must be framed in terms of that distinction if it is to remain sensitive to the condition that it seeks to alleviate.

THE UNAVAILABILITY OF RECONCILIATION

We may conclude that the primary topic of reflection with regard to which the distinction between receptivity and spontaneity is bound to stay with us is not our access to the external world but our stance toward the inherited models that inform our outlook. In fact, the order of importance between the two issues was recognized already at a very early stage in the development of German idealism. Hamann appears to have understood that reason's dependence on tradition was more fundamental than its dependence on experience. According to Hamann's *Metacritique*, the “first purification of reason” undertaken by Kant consisted in the attempt to “make reason independent of all tradition, custom and belief in them,” and the attempt to make reason independent of experience only came second.⁴³ Although in both respects Hamann overstated the radicality of Kant's claims on behalf of spontaneous thought, his basic sense of the relation between the problem of tradition and that of experience was surely right. My engagement with McDowell's book, written more than two centuries after Hamann's *Metacritique*, suggests a similar conclusion. It is only because the duality of receptivity and spontaneity persists along the axis of history that therapeutic projects cannot afford to bypass Kant's dualistic description of our rapport with the world.⁴⁴

For a theoretical enterprise whose goal is not therapeutic but critical, the need to hold on to the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity presents itself in a more direct form. Such is the case in Adorno's negative dialectics. In a section of *Minima Moralia* (1951) titled “The Morality of Thinking,” Adorno addresses a certain temptation, typically felt by writers who have grown weary of scholastic ratiocination, to play out naïveté against intellectual sophistication. In a manner recalling Gadamer's concession about the formal irrefutability of

Hegel's dialectic, Adorno points to the performative contradiction that vitiates ostensibly naïve appeals to what is immediately given. Adorno's insistence on the intertwinement between naïveté and sophistication partly reflects his sense that both stances tend toward complicity in the same underlying forms of societal injustice. Equally important, however, Adorno's line of thought responds to a predicament stemming from the problematic status of the Idealist legacy. It is in particular the eclipse of Hegelian idealism that makes it both imperative and impossible to conjoin naïve openness toward the object at hand with the sophistication of a hypervigilant mode of thought bent on examining and controlling its own operations. Adorno's comments on this point warrant extensive quotation:

The morality of thought lies in a procedure that is neither entrenched nor detached, neither blind nor empty, neither atomistic nor consequential. The double-edged method [*Die Doppelschlächtigkeit der Methode*] which has earned Hegel's *Phenomenology* the reputation among reasonable people of unfathomable difficulty, that is, its simultaneous demands that phenomena be allowed to speak as such—in a 'pure looking-on'—and yet that their relation to consciousness as the subject, reflection, be at every moment maintained, expresses this morality most directly and in all its depth of contradiction. But how much more difficult it has become to conform to such morality now that it is no longer possible to convince oneself of the identity of subject and object, the ultimate assumption of which still enabled Hegel to conceal the antagonistic demands of looking on and constructing [*des Zusehens und Konstruierens*]. Nothing less is asked of the thinker today than that he should be at every moment both within the things and outside them—Münchhausen pulling himself out of the bog by his pig-tail becomes the pattern of knowledge which wishes to be more than either verification or projection [*Feststellung oder Entwurf*]. And then the salaried philosophers come along and reproach us with having no point of view.⁴⁵

The phrase "neither blind nor empty" is an obvious reference to Kant's proverbial assertion that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."⁴⁶ Adorno's retrieval of the duality of receptivity and spontaneity involves, however, a key modification. The merely hypothetical negativity of Kant's dictum about empty thoughts and blind intuitions is intensified to a repeated dual negation ("neither/nor") that takes the form of an imperative. The result is an antinomy presented without any prospect of resolution: thought must be "both within the things and outside them." Because the Hegelian sublation of the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity is no longer an available option, Adorno is in no position to assume that limited or false figures of consciousness can be transcended by the sole means of phenomenological

immanence. Deprived of the support of idealism, critical thought must seek to combine thinking “from within the things” and thinking “outside of the things” with a clear awareness of the discontinuity between these two perspectives. Adorno is understandably eager to distinguish such oscillation between naïve immersion and critical sophistication from a mere “rhapsodic back and forth.” He clearly does not think, however, that this precarious movement can rely on any unitary guiding principle beside the vaguely defined morality that figures in the title of his mini-essay.

It is far from clear how claims with any sort of binding validity might issue from a thinking that dispenses with the guidance of a unitary principle. This is hardly the place to answer this question. Instead, I want to highlight a lesson of Adorno’s mini-essay about our historical situation, which converges with the outcome of my engagement with McDowell. Unless we can subscribe to speculative idealism, some form or other of the Kantian distinction between receptivity and spontaneity must remain an essential part of the vocabulary we use to make sense of our predicament as modern subjects. This constraint may be seen as a particularly consequential case of a necessity stated by Hans Blumenberg. “We must seek to understand Kant so thoroughly,” writes Blumenberg, “not because we *have* his problems but because our problems *would not be* the same if they had not emerged from his solutions.”⁴⁷ By attempting to think about experience without the aid of the distinction inherited from Kant, we would give up access to the insights at work in the tradition to which we owe the very shape of our thinking.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. and trans. Joel Weinheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004).

2. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1986), 918. The poem is dated January 31, 1922.

3. Jean Grondin, *Einführung zu Gadamer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 23. Along similar lines Christopher P. Smith writes in his essay about Rilke's poem: "Rilke is pointing to the foundations of a philosophical tradition extending from Descartes' *cogito me cogitare* to Hegel's *Selbstbewusstsein* and Husserl's *epoché*" ("A Poem of Rilke: Evidence for the Later Heidegger," *Philosophy Today* 21 [1977]: 253).

4. "Die Welt ist ihm nur ein Ball, den das Ich geworfen hat und den es bei der Reflexion wieder fängt!!" (Letter from Schiller to Goethe, October 28, 1794, *Briefe an Goethe*, vol. 1, ed. Karl Robert Mandelkow [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982], 172). Schiller's use of the analogy is not unprecedented. As Eric Osborn in *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005) points out, cognate uses of the image occur in the work of the church father Clement of Alexandria, who likens the relation between the divine word and faith to the one between throwing and catching in a ball game (166–167). Elsewhere Clement writes that the commandments that humans derive from the divine *logos* "turn back on us, as the ball rebounds on him that throws it by the repercussion" (Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatia, Theophilus, Athenagoras and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. James Donaldson and Alexander Roberts [New York: Cosimo, 2007], 236).

5. "Kinder werfen den Ball an die Wand und fangen ihn wieder; /Aber ich lobe das Spiel, wirft mir der Freund ihn zurück" (Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "Wechselwirkung," in *Goethes Werke*, vol. 1, ed. Erich Trunz [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996], 226). For the editor's commentary see *ibid.*, 638.

6. On this dispute see Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 269ff.

7. Rilke, *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1986), 918; translation mine.

8. The classic formulation of the scholastic principle was given by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, part 1, question no. 75. On Pico's inversion of this principle see August Buck, "Einleitung," in *Über die Würde des Menschen, Lateinisch-Deutsch* by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1990), xx.

9. Hans Robert Jauss writes of an "identification of production and comprehension" (*Ineinssetzung von Hervorbringen und Begreifen*) taking place in Leonardo's era; see *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 103–114.

10. Giambattista Vico, "On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Taken from the Origins of the Latin Language," in *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Leon Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 51.

11. Here I follow Robert Pippin, who argues that the theory of spontaneous mental activity represents the single most important contribution of German idealism to the philosophical framework of modernity. See Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 46–57; see also the "Introduction" and "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind," in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–56.

12. A forceful statement of the latter opposition can be found in the young Nietzsche's invective against the quasi-industrial productivity, division of labor, and methodological critique mandated by modern academia, all of which, according to Nietzsche, conspire to prevent documents of culture from having any lasting existential effect (*Wirkung*) upon the scholar; see especially sections 5 and 7 of Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 120–121, 136–137.

13. György Márkus, "Culture: The Making and the Make-Up of a Concept: An Essay in Historical Semantics," in *Culture, Science, Society: The Constitution of Cultural Modernity* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2011), 327–328.

14. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 324.

15. There is of course no shortage of book-length surveys and more thematically focused books dealing with this era. In addition to classics such as Richard Kroner's *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921/24) and Dieter Henrich's 1970s lectures, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures On German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), relevant studies include Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Grenzen der Vernunft: Untersuchungen zu Zielen und Motiven des deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Anton Hain, 1991); Christian Iber, *Subjektivität, Vernunft und ihre Kritik: Prager Vorlesun-*

gen über den deutschen Idealismus (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999); Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

16. A note about my use of pronouns is in order here. It is an unfortunate fact about most authors writing in the period under discussion that their default idea of a human subject in general was that of a male subject. To a certain degree, Friedrich Schlegel represents an exception to this rule, since his views on the matter of gender roles were a good deal more complex than those of his contemporaries. To acknowledge this fact, I shall throughout this book use “he,” “him,” and “his” to refer to a subject in general, with occasional alternation between masculine and feminine pronouns in the chapter on Schlegel.

17. Following standard scholarly usage, in subsequent references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* I identify passages by the pagination of the original 1781 (A) edition and the second 1788 (B) edition. Quotes are from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). My account of the premise of finitude is influenced by A. W. Moore, who ends up rejecting transcendental idealism as “incoherent” but endorses a Kantian conception of finitude; see *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. 158–160 and 120. Another influence is Heidegger’s account of the finitude of Kantian sensible intuition; although in talking of our existing “in the midst of” objects and being “delivered over” to them, Heidegger does not claim that we are, qua sensible beings, part of the world of objects (which would undercut Heidegger’s characterization of *Dasein* as “ek-static”), whereas Kant’s account, in my view, implies just this. For more details, see Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed., enlarged, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 19.

18. When Kant claims that “we are by no means justified” in assuming “another kind of intuition than the sensible kind” (A254), he means to deny the empirical or “real possibility” of such an intuition, not its logical possibility or thinkability (for that key distinction, see Bxxvi). This becomes clear from his subsequent claim that “the concept of a noumenon, i.e., of a thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a thing in itself (solely through a pure understanding), is not at all contradictory; for one cannot assert of sensibility that it is the only possible kind of intuition” (A254). It is the contrast between the form of human sensibility and hypothetical other forms of sensible intuition that creates the need for a second step of the “Transcendental Deduction of the Categories” (B144–145 and B150). On the

importance of this point about the contingency of space and time, i.e., their being a “mere quirk of human sensibility,” see John McDowell, “Hegel’s Idealism as Radicalization of Kant,” in *Having the World in View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 76; see also McDowell, “On Pippin’s Postscript,” in *ibid.*, 189.

19. The idea that subjects of receptivity are part of the world to which they are receptive may seem to imply that sensible receptivity is reducible to the type of causal interaction characteristic of physical objects. As Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Gottlob Ernst Schulze (*Anaesidemus*) argued in their early critiques of Kant, such a causal explanation of sensible affection would violate Kant’s restriction of the law of causality to the temporally ordered data of sensibility (B232). Since it is impossible to make sense of Kant’s doctrine of receptivity without addressing this toughest of problems, I offer the following compressed (and critical) interpretation. Kant does not deny that, from the point of view of empirical observation of our cognitive processes, sensory awareness of physical objects does indeed appear as a causal interaction between physical objects and the sentient human body. To the extent that the latter is considered as a phenomenal object occupying a unique spatiotemporal location, it is appropriate to say that finite knowers occupy a place within the phenomenal world. From the point of view of transcendental reflection on the conditions of possibility of cognition, however, we must *also* think (though cannot empirically know) the relation between sensible intuitions and the “thing-in-itself” in terms of the unschematized categories of causality and dependence, whose temporally schematized variants are the concepts of cause and effect specified in A144 and employed in the “Second Analogy of Experience.” In other words, whereas in the context of empirical observation the understanding (*Verstand*) connects nerve stimuli with phenomenal objects that cause them, in transcendental reflection reason (*Vernunft*) refers sensible intuitions to the thing in itself that we must think, but cannot know, as their metaphysical ground. For an account of affection by the thing in itself along these lines, see Nicholas Rescher, “Kant on Noumenal Causality,” in *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies In Kant’s Theory of Rational Systematization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21–36. However, contrary to Rescher’s charitable interpretation, I claim that it is not possible to maintain a neat parallelism between empirically caused bodily stimuli and transcendently grounded sensible intuitions, as if the two could be aligned with complementary perspectives or aspects. Such a dualistic interpretation is precluded by the fact, never in question for Kant, that the standpoint of human knowledge is individuated by the body, a spatiotemporally locatable phenomenal entity whose sensibility can be described in causal terms. In my view, Kant’s admission of the embodied character of human knowledge does not merely register an empirical fact, as Béatrice Longuenesse claims in “Self-Consciousness and Consciousness of One’s Own Body: Variations on a Kantian Theme,” *Philosophical Topics* 34, nos. 1–2 (2006): 285, 293, 302–303; rather, it follows from the presupposi-

tion of finitude, according to which we are implicated in the world of objects that we seek to know and therefore, as subjects of receptivity, we are ourselves subject to the forms of our receptivity. Thus, I suggest that Kant's transcendental reflection upon the constitution of experience cannot fully extricate itself from the constituted standpoint of empirical knowledge. For, insofar as Kant's conception of finitude entails the embodied character of sensibility, transcendental reflection upon the conditions of possibility of finite knowledge requires us to locate a key part of our cognitive apparatus within the empirical domain from which that apparatus is supposedly excluded. The doctrine of sensibility thus marks the point at which transcendental reflection on the constitution of experience is thrown back upon the field of empirical knowledge whose constitution it seeks to account for. If the necessarily embodied character of human knowledge is an epistemological manifestation of our finitude, correspondingly the loopback between the empirical and the transcendental level of description may be seen as its metaphilosophical expression.

20. On apperception as an adverbial feature, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19–24, 45. See also Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 54; and Pippin, "Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind," in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39–43. Pippin's interpretation is opposed to the widely held assumption that Kant is still captive to the reflection model of self-consciousness, according to which self-consciousness is a species of representational consciousness, entailing vicious circularity or an infinite regress. According to Dieter Henrich, it was Fichte who first overcame the reflection model, whereas Manfred Frank credits Novalis and Hölderlin with the same achievement. Partly against the historical narratives proposed by Henrich and Frank, Karl Ameriks convincingly argues that Kant's notion of apperception already points beyond the reflection model; see "From Kant to Frank: the Ineliminable Subject," in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 217–230.

21. As Béatrice Longuenesse notes, the transcendental unity of consciousness is both "my own" and, since it is constituted by a striving for judgment in conformity with intersubjectively valid concepts, capable of transcending my contingent perspective toward the standpoint of "everybody, always"; see *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 395.

22. On this point, see Dieter Henrich, "Identity and Objectivity: An Inquiry Into Kant's Transcendental Deduction," in *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Richard L. Velkley, trans. Jeffrey Edwards (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 201–202. See also Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 68.

23. Although, in principle, there could be other finite knowers who intuit things in a nonsensible way, under a priori forms other than space and time, the acts of thought by which such hypothetical subjects bestow objective status upon their intuitions would still have to conform to the same categories that also constrain human thought. As Kant puts it, “the categories extend further than sensible intuition, since they think objects in general without seeing to the particular manner (of sensibility) in which they might be given” (A254). This has led Paul Guyer and Karl Ameriks to argue that the categories are not subjective in the sense in which the forms of sensible intuition are, or are subjective only because knowledge requires their application to sensible intuitions restricted to humans. Against this view, William F. Bristow plausibly argues—defending Hegel’s criticism—that the categories are actually subjective in a more fundamental sense than are space and time, since the former are anchored not in the contingent constitution of a particular species of finite subjects but in the very structure of finite subjectivity as such: their necessity stems from the fact that, as Bristow puts it, “a subject cannot, as such, be properly bound by laws of which it cannot understand itself as the author” and such self-legislated laws are necessarily formal, in need of supplementation by intuited content. The sense in which our forms of intuition are subjective depends on an implied contrast to other, nonhuman kinds of finite minds that intuit things under forms other than space and time, whereas the subjectivity of the categories implies a more fundamental contrast to a hypothetical infinite mind whose acts of thought constitute the reality of what they are about (*Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2007], 49).

24. In her account of the latent presence of discursivity within sensibility Longuenesse suggests that the understanding, defined by Kant as “the capacity to judge,” should be understood as a *conatus* or continual striving to actualize itself in discursive judgments according to logical forms. It is this orientation toward the *conceptual unification* of an unlimited logical extension that requires and founds the *intuitional unity* of spatiotemporal infinitude in Kant’s account. See Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 223, 299–300.

25. G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 67–70, 73–74. In zeroing in on Kant’s account of the role played by the transcendental imagination in the synthesis of time and space as formal intuitions, Hegel follows Schelling’s lead; see F. W. J. Schelling, “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge,” in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 71–72. On the importance of this issue for Hegel’s critical appropriation of Kant, see Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 26–31, and Béatrice Longuenesse, “Point of View of Man or Knowledge of God: Kant and Hegel On Concept, Judgment and Reason,” in *Hegel’s Critique of*

Metaphysics, trans. Nicole J. Simek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 186–187.

26. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 78.

27. This is the crux of John McDowell's interpretation of Hegel's critique of Kant; see John McDowell, "Hegel's Idealism as Radicalization of Kant," in *Having the World in View*, 75–76.

28. The relevant portion of the argument runs from §154 to §165. Quotations in the following discussion are from G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller and ed. J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 94–103. On the critique of Kant implicit in this key transition of the *Phenomenology*, see Eric Watkins, "Kraft und Gesetz: Hegels Kant-Kritik im Kapitel 'Kraft und Verstand' der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*," in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 2010 (Berlin and Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 228–250.

29. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 99, §160.

30. On this point, see Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 318–322.

31. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 101, §162.

32. See Hegel's claim that "not only is consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness"—which was already the principle of Kant's transcendental deduction—"but that self-consciousness alone is the truth of those shapes," i.e., of the "previous shapes of consciousness for which their truth was a Thing, an 'other' than themselves" (*ibid.*, 102, §164).

33. *Ibid.*, 139–141, §231–234.

34. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 106–107.

35. *Ibid.*, 82.

36. Hegel's clearest statement of this view is in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*: "Consciousness . . . is explicitly the Notion of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. With the positing of a single particular the beyond is also established for consciousness, even if it is only alongside the limited object as in the case of spatial intuition. Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction" (*ibid.*, 51, §80). Although Kant was not entirely oblivious to this sort of dialectic, he employed it solely for diagnostic purposes. In a footnote in the third *Critique* he noted that certain modest-sounding judgments about "the proper measure of our powers" can actually be "presumptuous" (*vermessen*): in particular, the claim that certain teleological phenomena can only be explained as products of a divine intelligence presumes that the laws of mechanical causality employed

by the human mind have such great explanatory power that an organism too complex to be grasped in their terms could only be the product of a divine mind; see *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 254n; *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900-), vol. 5, 383. For an illuminating account of how Hegel's radicalization of Kant's critical project leads to a "self-transformational" critique that "manages to put the reflecting subject at stake in the inquiry, together with its relation to the object," see Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique*, 204.

37. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 55–56, §87.

38. On this point see Jonathan Lear, "The Disappearing 'We,'" in *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 300.

39. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 335–340.

40. On the Davos disputation, see Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000); and Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

41. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 19–21. Heidegger writes of a "Destruktion" (destruction) of traditional ontology; however, since he refrains from using such verbs as *zerstören* ("to destroy") or *destruieren* ("to destruct") and emphasizes the positive yield of his procedure (which is supposed to uncover the hidden sources of the tradition and bequeath a limited legitimacy upon it), Stambaugh's decision to render the term as "deconstructing" is not without merit.

42. Heidegger presented his interpretation in detail in his 1929 book on Kant, whose later editions include as appendices Heidegger's notes on his Davos lectures and the disputation with Cassirer. See Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, esp. 109–120, 144–164, 158–162, 188, 197, and 203.

43. Near the end of his Kant book Heidegger writes: "And yet, in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, did Kant not give mastery back to the understanding? And is it not a consequence of this that with Hegel metaphysics became 'Logic' more radically than ever before?" (*ibid.*, 171). See also Heidegger's suggestion in the Freiburg lectures he gave in the winter term of 1929/30: "Hegel's step from Kant to absolute idealism . . . became *possible* and *necessary* through Kant because the problem of human Dasein, the problem of finitude, did not properly become a problem for Kant himself. That is to say, this did not become a central problem of philosophy because Kant himself, as the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* reveals, helped to prepare the turn away from an uncomprehended finitude toward a comforting infinitude" (Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995], 208–209).

44. This approach comes to a head in the following claim made by Heidegger: "Hegel does not conceive experience dialectically; he thinks dialectics in terms of the essence of experience" (Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* [New York: Harper & Row, 1970], 119, translation modified).

45. Robert B. Pippin, "Gadamer's Hegel: Subjectivity and Reflection," in *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81.

46. "This direction of consciousness back into itself [*dieses Zurückführen des Bewusstseins in sich*] takes the form—very markedly in Plato—of asserting that man can learn nothing, virtue included, and that not because the latter has no relation to science. For the good does not come from without, Socrates shows; it cannot be taught, but is implied in the nature of mind. That is to say, man cannot passively receive anything [*passiv in sich aufnehmen*] that is given from without like the wax that is moulded to a form, for everything is latent in the mind of man [*es liegt alles im Geist des Menschen*], and he only seems to learn it. Certainly everything begins from without, but this is only the beginning; the truth is that this is only an impulse [*Anstoß*] towards the development of spirit" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1892], 410). For the German original, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, part 2, ed. Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), 142.

47. For this criticism of the Fichtean ego see Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 105, §167 and 141, §234. See also Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 157–168.

48. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 341. The available English translation renders "Selbstbespiegelung" as "self-reflection," but the visual metaphor, as well as the implication of merely formal, redundant duplication, are better captured by "self-mirroring."

49. *Ibid.*, 349–350 (translation modified).

50. As Gadamer puts it: "We are concerned with understanding effective-historical consciousness in such a way that the immediacy and superiority of the work does not dissolve into a mere reflective reality in the consciousness of the effect—i.e., we are concerned to conceive a reality that limits and exceeds the omnipotence of reflection" (*Truth and Method*, 338, translation modified).

51. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 2008), 174.

52. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301 (translation modified). Robert Pippin describes Gadamer's stance toward Hegel in terms of another, related, reversal—that of the "canonical relation between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*" ("Gadamer's Hegel," 90).

53. As witnessed by this passage, for instance: "The Archimedean point from

which Hegel's philosophy could be toppled can never be found through reflection. The formal superiority of reflective philosophy is precisely that every possible position is drawn into the reflective movement of consciousness coming to itself. The appeal to immediacy—whether of bodily nature, or the Thou making claims on us, or the impenetrable factualness of historical accident, or the reality of the relations of production—has always been self-refuting, in that it is not itself an immediate relation, but a reflective activity" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 339).

54. Ibid., 339–340. For the Heideggerian critique of the self-refutation argument, referenced by Gadamer, see Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 17–20. See also Heidegger's suggestion that "in-consequentiality [*In-Konsequenz*] belongs to finitude, not as a deficiency or an embarrassment but as an effective power" (ibid., 209).

55. Ibid., 340.

56. See Hegel's assertion in §13 of the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Only what is completely determined is at once exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and appropriated by all. The intelligible form of Science is the way open and equally accessible to everyone" (7). I return to Hegel's exoteric conception of philosophy in the conclusion.

57. See Adorno's claim that the goal of philosophy is to say what is unsayable in *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 21.

1. KANT ON THE FORMATION OF TASTE

1. To quote Hamann's relevant formulation: "The first purification of reason consisted in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and belief in them" ("Metacritique of the Purism of Reason," in *Johann Georg Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. Kenneth Haynes [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 207).

2. See, for example, Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1980; Pauline Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft: Zur Geschichtssphilosophie Kants* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1995); and Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

3. "Rien n'arrête tant le progrès des choses, rien ne borne tant les esprits, que l'admiration excessive des anciens" (Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle, "Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes," in *Oeuvres de Fontenelle*, vol. 5 [Paris: Jean François Bastien, 1790], 303).

4. Hans-Robert Jauss, "Ästhetische Normen und geschichtliche Reflexion in der 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,'" in *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et des sciences* (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964); and "Literarische Tradition und das gegenwärtige Bewußtsein der Modernität," in *Literaturgeschichte*

als *Provokation* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), esp. 29–35. Further treatments of the *Querelle* include Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), 153–156; Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 26–35; and Joan DeJean, *Ancients and Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

5. “c’est nous qui sommes les Anciens” (*Parallèle des anciens*, 113). On the sources of this key idea see Foster E. Guyer, “C’est nous qui sommes les anciens,” *Modern Language Notes* 31, no. 5 (1921): 257–264.

6. Jauss, “Ästhetische Normen,” 12.

7. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

8. *Ibid.*, 53.

9. *Ibid.*, 60.

10. Hans-Robert Jauss, “Schlegels und Schillers Replik auf die ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,’” in *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, 79–85.

11. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, “Thoughts on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks,” in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder and Goethe*, ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 33.

12. Winckelmann’s treatise thus participates in the momentous shift away from artistic imitation that painstakingly *follows* nature to the sort of playfully free “representation” (*Darstellung*) that enables art to disclose an ideal essence *anterior* to nature. Art is thus no longer a further step in the falling away from that ideal origin but a return to it through potentiation of its reflection. This inversion is made possible by a replacement of the Platonic hierarchy of ideal form, nature, and art with a dialectical model borrowed from neo-Platonism. On this shift, see Jochen Hörisch, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft der Poesie: Der Universalitätsanspruch von Dichtung in der frühromantischen Poetologie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 128–129. Plotinus was the first thinker to base his defense of art (in Book 8 of the Fifth Ennead) upon artists’ capacity for producing imitations of the Platonic idea that are more perfect than its empirical instantiations in nature. For more details, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Its Critical Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 42–46. On the role of artistic idealization in Winckelmann, see Michael Fried, “Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation,” *October* 37 (1986): 88. As Sándor Radnóti notes, Winckelmann burdens art with the task of idealization because he thinks that a corrupting combination of natural and political factors has led to a decline of physical beauty in Nordic modernity (“Why One Should Imitate the Greeks: On Winckelmann,” in *Aspects of the Enlightenment: Aesthetics, Politics, and Religion*, ed. Ferenc Hörcher and Endre Szécsényi [Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004], 222).

13. As Winckelmann put it, “the connoisseurs and imitators of the works of the Greeks find in their masterpieces not only the highest beauties of nature, but something more than nature [*noch mehr als Natur*]: namely certain ideal beauties which, as an ancient commentator of Plato puts it, ‘are based on images constructed solely by the mind’” (“Thoughts on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks,” 33). On the neo-Platonic reference see my previous note.

14. Hence Winckelmann’s endorsement of Michelangelo’s verdict that “he who constantly follows others will never lead the way himself; and whoever can produce nothing of value from his own resources will not make profitable use of the works of others either” (*ibid.*, 39).

15. Fried, “Antiquity Now,” 90.

16. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition. In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London: A. Millar and R. and J. Dodsley, 1759), 17–18.

17. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

18. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

19. Sándor Radnóti, *Jöjj és láss! A modern művészetfogalom keletkezése. Winckelmann és a következmények* [Come and see! The genesis of the modern concept of art—Winckelmann and his aftermath] (Budapest: Atlantisz, 2010), 241. A chapter of Radnóti’s book is available in English as “Why One Should Imitate the Greeks: On Winckelmann,” in *Aspects of the Enlightenment: Aesthetics, Politics, and Religion*, ed. Ferenc Hörcher and Endre Szécsényi. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004), 202–237. My account in this paragraph relies on Radnóti’s study.

20. Radnóti, *Jöjj és láss!*, 250, 271. Radnóti’s analysis ingeniously exploits Winckelmann’s use of the term *Kolonie*, which at the time still primarily meant an outpost of civilization dedicated to the cultivation of a remote, wild territory (often in a literal, agricultural sense).

21. *Ibid.*, 241.

22. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Hölderlin and the Greeks,” in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 236.

23. *Ibid.*, 243. Following Lacoue-Labarthe’s suggestion, Michael Fried has argued that already Winckelmann’s *Thoughts* show signs of a similar complication; see Fried, “Antiquity Now,” 93n. Crucial to Fried’s argument is the “third term” in Winckelmann’s treatise, namely Renaissance art, which features both as an instance of successful imitation and as a paradigm to be imitated, eluding any straightforward distinction between ancient and modern. As Radnóti notes, however, Winckelmann’s comments about Renaissance art are more guarded than Fried makes them out to be, and the mediating role he assigns to the Renaissance is limited to painting, where no ancient models were available; see Radnóti, *Jöjj és láss!*, 245.

24. Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010)

25. Ibid., 1.

26. Following standard scholarly practice, passages from the third *Critique* will be identified by volume and page of the *Akademie Ausgabe*, or Academy edition, *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen (Königlichen Preussischen) Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902). All subsequent quotes are from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

27. Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 21.

28. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

29. According to the relevant doctrine of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a schema is a mediating representation that enables us to apply a spontaneously generated concept (i.e., a rule for unifying intuitions) to particular sensible intuitions. The schema of a concept is a "method" or "general procedure" for generating a spatiotemporal image adequate to all sensible manifolds falling under a given concept (A141). It defines an abstract spatiotemporal configuration or pattern, a "shadowy image" or "monogram" (A142), that serves as a general sensible "exhibition" of the concept, and in comparison with which sensible intuitions can be recognized under the concept in question and subjected to the relevant rule of unification. In the first *Critique*, Kant mainly deals with the schemata of transcendental concepts of objects as such (i.e., the categories). However, it may be argued that already here the schematism doctrine is meant to bridge the gap, not between transcendental and empirical representations, but between spontaneously generated and sensibly received ones. Although Kant is silent on the nature of empirical schemata, his account of the aesthetic use of reflecting judgment in the third *Critique* clearly implies that empirical concepts too are aided by schemata. Thus Kant writes of the productive imagination as "the authoress of voluntary [*willkürlich*] forms of possible intuitions" (5:240), where "forms of possible intuition" can only mean "schemata" belonging to a yet-to-be-formed empirical concept. Elsewhere Kant writes that, since in reflecting judgment no empirical concept is available as yet, the imagination "schematizes without a concept" (5:287). That the imagination is involved here in its productive, rather than reproductive, function is confirmed by the chapter on taste in the *Anthropology*, where Kant names the productive imagination as the source of aesthetic form; see *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. and ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137, *Akademie Ausgabe* 7:240.

30. On the interpretive difficulties generated by the latter claim see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 262–264.

31. Although Kant does not explicitly make this argument, I believe it represents

the most charitable reconstruction of the thought motivating his claim that the principle of taste is subjective. It is also entailed by Kant's key claim about reflecting judgment in section 4 of the introduction, to the effect that the exercise of reflecting judgment cannot involve the application of a fixed principle, "for then it would be the determining power of judgment" (5:180). It is only if reflection were guided by a determinate conceptual rule—and not just the purely formal, and merely heuristic or "subjective," principle of nature's purposiveness vis-à-vis reflecting judgment, as Kant actually claims in 5:184–186—that one could specify the conditions of optimal alignment between the two faculties in terms of determinate objective concepts.

32. As Paul Guyer puts it, a judgment of disinterestedness is "not made on the basis of a simple introspection of feeling; it is, rather, an indirect judgment linking a felt pleasure to the harmony of the faculties in virtue of the absence of evidence for certain other judgments about the cause or effect of that pleasure. . . . The lack of a separate consciousness of the ground of aesthetic response is why aesthetic judgment must be the product of reflection. The criterion of disinterestedness does not reveal any new form of evidence which can be a direct object of consciousness in such reflection, but it does establish an indirect method by which reflection can proceed" (*Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 181).

33. Stanley Corngold, "What is Radical In Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment?'" *Complex Pleasure* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 51.

34. I am here following Béatrice Longuenesse's distinction between "a first-order pleasure we take in the mutual enlivening of imagination and understanding" and a "second-order pleasure" attaching to the recognition that the first-order pleasure "could and ought to be shared by all"; see Longuenesse, "Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful," in Kukla, *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 207. The distinction should be understood heuristically, however, not phenomenologically. We may take Kant to mean, not only that the pleasure induced by the purposiveness of the object for "mere reflection" is enhanced by the subsequent self-reflexive recognition of its universal imputability, but that this surplus pleasure reinforces, or "feeds back into," the self-perpetuating dynamic of the harmonious free play about which the judgment of universality is made.

35. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 266–267.

36. In his 2001 Tanner lecture, Alexander Nehamas quotes Kant's claim—"if one . . . calls the object beautiful, one believes oneself to have a universal voice, and lays claim to the consent of everyone"—and comments: "He thinks, of course, that this belief is correct." As I hope to have shown, this claim is unwarranted, as is the rest of Nehamas's characterization of the Kantian position: "if the judgment of taste is a genuine judgment, then, as Mary Mothersill argues, it is either true or false; if it is true, everyone should accept it; there is therefore something wrong with those who don't. Worse, since we all believe our judgments are true (whether or not they really

are), we must feel that everyone whose taste differs from ours is 'slightly defective—as if something blocked his perception or impaired his sensibility.'"; see "A Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art. The Tanner Lectures On Human Values Delivered at Yale University, April 9–10, 2001," *Tanner Lectures*, http://tanner-lectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/n/Nehamas_02.pdf, 209n2.

37. Rodolphe Gasché identifies the task incumbent on the doctrine of the ideal of beauty in similar terms but does not attempt to make sense of Kant's specification of the ideal. See Gasché, *The Idea of Form*, 101–102.

38. The doctrine of the ideal of beauty has received relatively little attention in the scholarship on the third *Critique*. Henry Allison goes so far as to assert that it "does not really contribute anything further to the theory of taste itself" (*Kant's Theory of Taste*, 143). As should be clear from my discussion, I disagree with this assessment.

39. Kant's account of the ideas of reason is developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A310–332.

40. On the three transcendental ideas of reason, see *Critique of Pure Reason*, A334–335.

41. The relevance of Kant's doctrine of schematism to the discussion of the ideal of beauty is noted by John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 127. An illuminating interpretation of the ideal of beauty in terms of the theory of symbolization offered in §59 has been developed by Rachel Zuckert. Zuckert argues that the averaging rule by which reflecting judgment produces the idea of standard beauty may be seen as a "sensible, functional analogy for rational universalization, and for our shared, human vocation. . . . The 'aesthetic standard idea' serves, then, as an image of what it would be to 'match up to' the purpose set by our biological kind, which biological 'purpose' in turn symbolizes our higher, and true purpose, morality, for the 'humanity' in each of us" ("Boring Beauty and Universal Morality: Kant on the Ideal of Beauty," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 2 (2005): 123).

42. The affinities of Kant's doctrine of the ideal of beauty with the classicism of Winckelmann and Lessings has been pointed out by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, 42.

43. As Hegel writes: "in considering the beautiful, we are unaware of the concept and subsumption under it, and . . . the separation between the individual object and the universal concept, which elsewhere is present in judgement, is impermissible here" (*Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010] 59). See also Hegel's comments in G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 87. In Adorno's view, by contrast, Kant's account deserves praise for highlighting an irreconcilable contradiction inherent in art, and especially modern art, between the conceptual and the nonconceptual moment. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel

Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 97, 343.

44. In §8 Kant notes that, unlike in the case of cognitive judgments, the subjective universality of a pure judgment of taste does not entail the objective universality of “logical” concepts (5:215). However, when Kant writes in the same passage that the pure judgment of taste “does not pertain to the object at all” what he means to deny is not that the judgment responds to the particular thing before me but, rather, that it bears on the thing qua object in the technical, Kantian sense (“that in the concept of which a manifold of a given intuition is united,” as Kant defines the term in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, B137). For a phenomenologically nuanced interpretation that does justice to the way in which the judgment of taste is responsive to the object, see Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Zuckert construes beauty as a kind of meta-property consisting in the “interrelatedness” of multiple properties of a beautiful object and she asserts on that ground “the non-translatability of those properties (or of pleasure in them) from one object to another” (194). On this reading, “the items of the manifold in aesthetic representation reciprocally contrast and complement one another, reciprocally render one another intelligible, are represented as making the object what it is as an individual whole” (226), but since they are “represented as intimately interconnected, each what it is only in the context of this object, they too are not conceptually identified/identifiable, cannot serve to classify objects, are neither grounded in, nor useful for, ‘comparison’ of this object to other objects” (228).

45. See Kant’s account of purposiveness without an end in §10–11 and his claim in §30 that the judgment of beauty “does not indicate the relation of the object to others in accordance with concepts” (5:160).

46. One might object that a judgment of discrimination that recognizes some objects, but not others, as beautiful cannot be thought of as disclosing universal conditions of possibility of knowledge. Along these lines, Paul Guyer has argued that Kant’s assertion that the proportion of the faculties is a variable function of the particular object undercuts his claim that the pleasure registering in pure judgments of taste is based on universal epistemic conditions (*Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 262–264). In response to this objection, I note that a theory according to which all objects of knowledge occasioned an aesthetic suspension of cognition would be self-defeating. It is because only *some* objects invite such a suspension—standing out as beautiful against a background of ordinary knowability—that our encounters with such objects can afford a noncognitive disclosure of the purposiveness of nature as a whole with respect to our cognitive interests.

47. My interpretation of Kant’s *sensus communis aestheticus* is here indebted to Jonathan Lear’s dialectical construal (drawing on Kant, Hegel, and the later Witt-

genstein) of the relation between our form of life and our self-conception: “we gain insight into who ‘we’ are by considering the representations to which we are willing to append a ‘We are so minded’” (“The Disappearing ‘We,’” in *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 300.

48. As Henry Allison notes, however, Kant is not suggesting that the demand for agreement expressed in the pure judgment of taste is dependent on the moral law. In the passage in §22, Kant posits a general second-order demand to develop one’s taste that is distinct from the first-order demand for agreement expressed in particular judgments of taste. It is only the second-order imperative of aesthetic cultivation that is dictated by the higher rational interest of morality. Far from it being the case that the normativity of taste can be derived from morality, the autonomy of the norm invoked in the first-order demand is crucial to Kant’s demonstration of the relevance of taste to morality, as expressed in the second-order demand of cultivation. See Henry Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 157, 195, and 222.

49. Immanuel Kant, “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht,” (8:20). Here Kant argues that humans’ unsocial sociability is rooted in a kind of natural unnaturalness. “Natural artificiality” (*natürliche Künstlichkeit*) is a central law of the philosophical anthropology developed in Helmuth Plessner’s 1928 book, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie. Dritte, unveränderte Auflage* (New York and Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 316.

50. The two-fold reference is noted by Markus Arnold, “Die harmonische Stimmung aufgeklärter Bürger. Zum Verhältnis von Politik und Ästhetik in Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft*,” *Kant-Studien* 94, no. 1 (2006): 24–25.

51. Radnóti, “Why One Should Imitate the Greeks,” 236. See also Mortimer N. S. Sellers, “Revolution, French,” in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 822–826.

52. In §50, Kant suggests that if genius and taste come into conflict the former must accept a partial sacrifice of its demands (5:319–320). For other passages in which Kant characterizes taste as a negative, disciplining agency that must “clip the wings” of genius to enforce the requirements of beautiful form, see 5:310 and 5:313. I agree with Guyer that this strand in the third *Critique* represents a “recoil” from the more dynamic picture that emerges from Kant’s account, although later on in this chapter I will take issue with Guyer’s characterization of that picture. See Paul Guyer, “Genius and the Canon of Art: A Second Dialectic of Taste,” in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 301.

53. This paradigm must be distinguished from conceptions that require contemporary artists to free themselves from the constricting influence of the cultural past

through a return to raw nature. See Friedrich Hölderlin, “Der Gesichtspunct aus dem wir das Altertum anzusehen haben,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, division 4, vol. 1 ed. Friedrich Beißner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961), 221–222; and F. W. J. Schelling, “Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur,” *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1860), 324–326. Hölderlin’s “patriotic turn” around 1802 results in yet another position, according to which cultural production must first achieve the opposite of one’s ownmost natural disposition before an appropriation of the latter can even be attempted. See Friedrich Hölderlin, Letter no. 236 to Casimir Böhlendorff, December 4, 1801, in *Sämtliche Werke* vol. 6, bk. 1, ed. Adolf Beck and Friedrich Beißner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1954), 425–428.

54. As Markus Arnold notes, the parallelism that Kant sees between political and aesthetic developments echoes Winckelmann’s claim that art flourished in periods of civic freedom (Arnold, “Die harmonische Stimmung aufgeklärter Bürger,” 26n).

55. On this point, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 48.

56. To be sure, this characterization of Kant’s position must be qualified by the reminder that the nature, whose productivity is manifested in art, is not the phenomenal domain of Newtonian natural-scientific knowledge but nature within us, the unknowable noumenal ground of our mental faculties—or, in Spinozistic terms, not *natura naturata* but *natura naturans* (5:340–344). Moreover, the relation between nature and art is complicated by the fact that the principle of purposiveness guiding reflecting judgment requires us to think of phenomenal nature after the analogy of art, i.e., to proceed in establishing particular species for each genus “as if” a creative intelligence had specified the general laws of nature with a view to the requirements of our systematizing activity (5:215). As Kant famously puts it in §45: “Nature was beautiful, if at the same time it looked like art; and art can only be called beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature” (5:306).

57. For versions of this view see, for example, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 60; Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, 279; Gasché, *Idea of Form*, 179–201. This view is usually bolstered by reminders to the effect that Kant had little or no substantial exposure to significant art, a commonplace extensively challenged by Budick in *Kant and Milton* (esp. 10–11). See also Theodor W. Adorno’s claim (whose dubiousness should be clear from the *prima facie* implausible inclusion of Hegel) that “Kant and Hegel were the last who, to put it bluntly, were able to write major aesthetics without understanding anything about art” (“Draft Introduction,” in *Aesthetic Theory*, 334).

58. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 143–152.

59. *Ibid.*, 71.

60. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

61. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 50.

62. J. M. Bernstein, *Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation From Kant to Adorno* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 21–23.

63. References to art in the “Transcendental Deduction” include the example of the young poet with the ensuing lengthy discussion of classics in §32, which I quoted earlier in the chapter, and the hypothetical scenario in §33, in which someone’s assessment of a work is contradicted by such authoritative critics as Batteux and Lessing. On the side of natural beauty, all we find are two cursory examples involving a “flower” (§32) and a “single tulip” (§33).

64. For the claim about Kant’s alleged “structural negligence,” see John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 129. By drawing attention to the increasingly central role played by art in the “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment,” I do not mean to make the radically heterodox claim that nature is of secondary importance in Kant’s aesthetics. Nature occupies center stage in the “Analytic of the Sublime,” and it returns to prominence in the difficult argument about “the intelligible substratum of nature” that Kant deploys to resolve the antinomy of taste (5:345). Yet even the latter argument runs on two tracks: whereas the one concerns the intelligible ground of nature “outside us,” the other concerns the ground of nature “in us” (or the “that which is merely nature in the subject, i.e., the supersensible substratum of all our faculties”), understood as the source of artistic genius (5:344).

65. By extending the argument of §17 in this direction we may begin to see the deeper philosophical reason for the seemingly puzzling emergence of the topic of art in that section. Gadamer has noted the shift from imaginative representation to artistic presentation in Kant’s discussion of both the normal idea of beauty and the ideal of taste. According to Gadamer, the doctrine of the ideal of beauty represents a key juncture where Kant’s aesthetics departs from a rationalist, cosmologically oriented aesthetics of perfection; by highlighting a paradigm case in which a sensible shape “speaks meaningfully to us,” allowing the human being to encounter himself, the doctrine of the ideal of beauty “also prepares a place for the essence of art” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 42–43). According to Zammito, §17 “represents the transition to the consideration of art” (*Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, 129).

66. Although the thesis that life is a matter of establishing and maintaining boundaries is usually associated Helmut Plessner’s theory of organic life, the idea is already present in Hegel’s relevant reflections.

67. Hegel develops this idea in some detail in the section on “The Dependence of Immediate Individual Existence” in the *Aesthetics*, concluding with the famous remarks on the “prose of the world”; see G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures On Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 147–150.

68. “For every art presupposes rules which first lay the foundation by means of which a product that is to be called artistic is first represented as possible” (5:307).

69. This linkage between intentionality and the determinacy of aesthetic attitude should not be taken to suggest that the “correct” mode of aesthetic response is the one intended by the author of a work of art. When it comes to works from distant historical eras, the generic rules of appreciation that govern our response to a given work may have little to do with the artist’s intentions. Greek tragedy and Bach’s sacred music are only the most famous examples of radical transformation in aesthetic function. In thinking about such cases, one might attribute the implicit intentionality behind current-day rules of appreciation to the historically evolved institutions that display or perform the work (e.g., a museum, a chorus, or a theater) and, ultimately, the community maintaining such institutions. Contrary to Kant’s assumption of perfect symmetry between how a given object came into being and how it is perceived—the key to his derivation of the concept of artistic genius from the theory of aesthetic response—a gap between the two may actually open up in the case of some natural objects as well. One might say of such iconic natural landscapes as the Matterhorn, Half Dome, or Niagara Falls that their “staging” by the tourism industry has resulted in the institutionalization of certain rules of perception. This does not contradict my point, however, since there is a sense in which the interposition of artifacts (e.g., postcards or paintings) depicting the iconic landscapes at issue has made it all but impossible to see them as innocent nature.

70. Although the ideal of beauty is a conceptually determinate representation of an organism, it is nonetheless immune to this problem; by definition, the imaginatively projected schema of a concept cannot be considered as an instantiation (whether perfect or flawed) of that concept.

71. Admittedly, this change is less pronounced in relation to the beautiful than to the sublime. Since the purposiveness of which we become aware when we experience the formlessness of the sublime actually pertains to the subject’s faculties, whereas beautiful form reveals a purposiveness of the object (5:279–280), we may infer that the experience of the sublime is more strongly effected by historical changes in our attitudes toward nature. It is nevertheless clear from Kant’s account that judgments of beauty also require aesthetic cultivation and that therefore appreciation for the beauties of nature presupposes that a purely agonistic relation to nature has been left behind.

72. Novalis may be credited with the most striking statement of the idea, which was likely inspired by a profound engagement with the third *Critique*: “In the earliest times of the discovery of the faculty of judgment, every new judgment was a find [*ein Fund*]. The worth of this find rose, the more practicable and fertile the judgment was. Verdicts which now seem to us very common then still demanded an unusual level of intellectual life. One had to bring genius and acuity together in order to find new relations using the new tool. Its application to the most characteristic, interesting, and general aspects of humanity necessarily aroused exceptional admiration and

drew the attention of all good minds to itself. In this way those bodies of proverbial sayings came into being that have been valued so highly at all times and among all peoples. It would easily be possible for the discoveries of genius we make today to meet with a similar fate in the course of time. There could easily come a time when all that would be as common as moral precepts are now, and new, more sublime discoveries would occupy the restless spirit of men" ("Miscellaneous Observations no. 77," in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997] 37). For the *locus classicus* on the disenchantment of nature, see Max Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 536.

73. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 227.

74. I take it that the same view is implicit in Gasché's claim that "[t]he singular rule of a beautiful work of art corresponds to one specific harmonious arrangement of the faculties that is beneficial to cognition in general" (Gasché, *Idea of Form*, 186).

75. Guyer, "Genius and the Canon of Art," 293.

76. *Ibid.*, 294.

77. *Ibid.*, 298.

78. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26. The Kantian affinities of Bloom's theory are obscured by Bloom's vague reference to "Cartesian dualism." What Bloom describes under this heading is in fact a variation on the Kantian duality of empirical causation and transcendental freedom: a duality between the successor poet's entrapment within the unidirectional, linear temporality of influence and his participation in the more intricate, retroactive temporality of literary history, through which he is granted the freedom of "fathering" his precursor (32).

79. *Ibid.*, 286.

80. Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3: *The Guermantes Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), 42–43.

81. *Ibid.*, 48.

82. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 183. Acutely aware that the greatest works of art are precisely the ones most susceptible to fetishization, Adorno claims that philosophical reflection is needed to salvage the inherent foreignness of such works from the leveling familiarity created by tradition.

83. Guyer, "Genius and the Canon of Art," 296–297.

84. Novalis, "On Goethe," in *Classic and German Romantic Aesthetic*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 228–229; and Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," no. 149, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 37, and no. 271, *ibid.*, 56.

See also Schlegel's assertion: "From what the moderns aim at, we learn what poetry ought to become; from what the ancients do, what it must be" ("Critical Fragments," no. 84, *ibid.*, 10, translation modified).

85. Friedrich Schlegel, "From 'Critical Fragments,'" no. 117, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 244. See also this excerpt from Schlegel's essay "On Goethe's Meister": "What else but a poem can come into being when a poet in full possession of his powers contemplates a work of art and represents it in his own. . . . The poet and artist on the other hand will want to represent the representation anew, and form once more what has already been formed; he will add to the work, restore it, shape it afresh" (*Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, 281).

86. On works of art containing a philosophy of art, see Friedrich Schlegel, "From 'Athenaeum Fragments,'" nos. 238 and 255, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, 253–254, and "On Goethe's Meister," *ibid.*, 274.

87. Karl Ameriks, "The Key Role of *Selbstgefühl* in Philosophy's Aesthetic and Historical Turns," in *Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy As Critical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 269–288.

2. KANTIAN REVISIONISM AND REVISIONIST KANTIANISM

1. Immanuel Kant, "On a Discovery whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One," in *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 319n.

2. In view of this fact, Anthony Curtis Adler argues that—since critical philosophy requires reason to recognize the Epicurean (sensualist) and Platonistic (intellectualist) tendencies at work in it, and since these tendencies manifest themselves in a history of futile struggles over metaphysics—critical philosophy "involves nothing else than reason becoming aware of its historical character" ("Sensual Idealism: The Spirit of Epicurus and the Politics of Finitude in Kant and Hölderlin," in *Dynamic Reading: Studies in the Reception of Epicureanism*, ed. Brooke Holmes and W. H. Shearin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 205). However, as Adler points out, by deriving historical doctrines from tendencies rooted in the nature of reason—tendencies "reflected in, but not exhausted by" their historical manifestations (*ibid.*, 219)—Kant effectively "dissolves the letter of Epicurus and Plato into their pure philosophical spirit" (*ibid.*, 217). The result is what I would describe as an erasure of the historicality of reason, whereby the history of reason's vicissitudes is relegated to an illustrative role. The step never taken by Kant is the one that Hegel will hazard in the transition from the first half of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (ending with the "Reason" chapter) to the second half. I shall have more to say about this step in chapter 5.

3. Admittedly, Kant's way of distinguishing between method and content, spirit and letter with respect to the particular case of Wolff appears quite willful: consid-

ered from the Kantian perspective, Wolff's failure to submit reason to critique would seem to represent *the* defining feature of the method or spirit of dogmatism, not one of its substantive doctrines.

4. Kant, "On a Discovery," 334.

5. Otto Friedrich Bollnow, "Was heisst, einen Schriftsteller besser zu verstehen, als er sich verstanden hat," in *Das Verstehen: Drei Aufsätze zur Theorie der Geisteswissenschaften* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1949). Bollnow speculates that Kant is invoking an unwritten tenet of contemporaneous philological practice, a claim contested by Gadamer on the grounds that the principle of better understanding is at odds with the authoritative status of the classics for humanist philology, which tended to treat texts as models for imitation and emulation; see *Truth and Method*, 193. Kant's endorsement of better understanding has elicited extensive commentary; see Heinrich Nüsse, *Die Sprachtheorie Friedrich Schlegels* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962), 92–95; E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 19–20; Kurt Müller-Vollmer, "To Understand an Author Better Than the Author Himself," *Language and Style* 5 (Winter 1971): 43–52; Ernst Behler, "What It Means to Understand an Author Better Than He Understood Himself: Idealistic Philosophy and Romantic Hermeneutics," in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift in Honor of René Wellek*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (Bern: Peter Lang, 1984), 69–92; and Harald Schnur, *Schleiermachers Hermeneutik und ihre Vorgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Bibelauslegung, zu Hamann, Herder und F. Schlegel* (Weimar: Metzler, 1994), 147–152.

6. It is this claim that goes unexplained in Ernst Behler's reading; according to Behler, Kant was merely concerned with "the author's confusion in his manner of expressing himself" ("What It Means," 74)—a reading contradicted by Kant's willingness to entertain the possibility that the author not only spoke or wrote but also "thought contrary to his own intention." Behler's weak interpretation of Kant's statement is also inconsistent with the specific context in which it occurs. Kant could have hardly meant that Plato's doctrine of ideas was a confused expression of the same thought that Kant himself was propounding in the first *Critique*. What Kant seems to be suggesting, instead, is that Plato's doctrine of ideas contains the Kantian conception in a germinal form; if only Plato had consistently thought this doctrine to its logical end, so Kant seems to think, he would have necessarily arrived at the Kantian position.

7. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 193.

8. Kant, "On a Discovery," 319n.

9. Plato, *Theatetus*, 149a–151d.

10. Kant, "On a Discovery," 336.

11. To quote Hamann's relevant comment: "although the acute observation about Plato on p. 314 might also prove right in respect of the legislator and critic

[*Kunstrichter*] of pure reason himself" (Johann Georg Hamann, "Kritik der reinen Vernunft," in *Sämtliche Werke* vol. 3, ed. Josef Nadler [Brockhaus: Wuppertal, 1999], 279). Although Hamann's "Metakritik" was published only in 1800, Hamann sent copies to Jacobi and Herder, by way of whose mediation it exerted a powerful influence well before its publication (Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987], 38). By drawing a parallel between Kant's "transcendental doctrine of method" and the "Pauline discipline of the law," Hamann also anticipated Hegel's pejorative comparison—inspired by Paul's letter to the Corinthians—of Kantian formalism to the "dead letter" of Judaic law.

12. Schlegel's note in the original is as follows: "Je wichtiger die Sache bei *Kant* je tiefer sein Gedanke, desto schlechter verworren d[er] Vortrag. Er kann nicht von sich geben, dreht sich nun immer und würgt es hundertmal hervor, immer etwas andres, nie ganz klar. Was man nicht mittheilen kann, weiß man noch nicht recht" (*Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 18, ed. Ernst Behler [München, Paderborn, Wien: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1963], 59; hereafter referenced as *KFSA*). It is typical of the nonsystematic nature of Schlegel's thought that one can find formulations to the contrary effect in his texts; thus, we read the following in the essay on Lessing: "An author, whether it be an artist or a thinker, who can put to paper everything he knows or is capable of is at the very least no genius" (Ein Autor, er sei Künstler oder Denker, der alles was er vermag, oder weiß, zu Papiere bringen kann, ist zum mindesten kein Genie) ("Über Lessing," *KFSA*, 2:111). The suggestion here seems to be that a genius may in fact know things that he cannot communicate. One may only conjecture that Schlegel has a different, "weaker" sense of "knowing" in mind here than in the claim that one only knows what one can communicate, a sense indicated by the phrasing "*alles was er vermag, oder weiß*": a genius "has the capacity" to produce and release meaning that he does not really "know"—in the sense of conscious possession—and hence cannot put into words either.

13. "Kant ist ein genialischer Pedant" ("Form der Kantischen Philosophie," in *KFSA*, 18:59).

14. "All positive error in the transcendental area is lack of faith. Deception here is not possible—it belongs only to the domain of the sensible world—but misunderstanding is—because the language is lacking" (Aller positive Irrthum im transcendentalen Gebiet ist Unglaube. Täuschung ist hier nicht möglich—die gehört nur ins Gebiet der Sinnenwelt—wohl aber Mißverständnis—weil es an der Sprache fehlt) ("Philosophische Lehrjahre," in *KFSA*, 5:1005).

15. "One cannot without injustice dispute that Kant sincerely sought the truth, that at the very least he was strenuously groping about for it in the twilight area between unilluminated reason and common experience. Yet before he arrived at a resolution and some sort of satisfaction, before he even came close to the sources of truth, he already wanted to master that which he has barely understood yet and

he presumptuously wanted to erect an all-powerful doctrinal edifice.” (Man kann wohl ohne Ungerechtigkeit nicht in Abrede sein, daß auch Kant die Wahrheit redlich gesucht, daß er wenigstens in dem dämmernden Raum zwischen der unerleuchteten Vernunft und der gemeinen Erfahrung mühevoll nach ihr herumgetappt habe. Aber ehe er noch selbst zur Auflösung und zu irgend einer Befriedigung gelangt, ehe er den Quellen der Wahrheit auch nur nahe gekommen war, wollte er schon meistern was er noch kaum verstanden hatte, und ein alles beherrschendes Lehrgebäude anmaßend aufstellen. [KFSa, 8:460].)

16. As Paul Franks notes, the Pauline metaphor was first used by K. L. Reinhold; see “The Discovery of the Other: Cavell, Fichte, and Skepticism,” *Common Knowledge* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 83n30. The theological implications of the Pauline metaphor remain operative throughout its repeated deployments in post-Kantian idealism. Thus, for instance, the Hegelian culmination of previous idealist attempts at rewriting the letter of Kantian philosophy in accordance with its spirit begins with the young Hegel’s analogy between Judaic law and the negative formality of the Kantian moral law: just as the dead letter of Judaism had to be imbued with the enlivening spirit of Christian love, so, according to Hegel, Kant’s formalistic philosophy had to be revised according to the spirit of absolute idealism; see John H. Smith, *The Spirit and the Letter: Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel’s Philosophy of Bildung* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 133; and Yirmiahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 34. Under the obvious influence of Otto Weininger’s racist typology, Wittgenstein reverses the Pauline view of the hermeneutic relation between Judaism and Christianity and suggests in one of his notes that the principle of revisionist interpretation is “Jewish”: “It is typical of the Jewish mind to understand someone else’s work better than he understands it himself” (*Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. Georg Henrik von Wright and Heikki Nyman [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 17).

17. Reinhold’s *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (1789) set the agenda for an unprecedented wave of speculation by espousing Kant’s conclusions but declaring the need for a more systematic elaboration of his premises. On the importance for revisionist Kantianism of Reinhold’s distinction between conclusions and premises, see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995), 76–80. The most influential attempt at accomplishing this task was no doubt Fichte’s *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794). Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) represented the last great achievement of this period, shortly followed Hegel’s critique of the *Reflexionsphilosophie* of his Jena predecessors.

18. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 96.

19. "Möchte uns Hr. F. nur wenigstens seine *Theorie über Geist und Buchstabe*, die mit dem Innersten und Eigensten seiner Philosophie wesentlich zusammenhängen muß, bald mittheilen!" (Schlegel, "Rezension der ersten vier Bände von F. Niethammers philosophischem Journal. 1797," in *KFSA*, 8:26).

20. Schlegel, to be sure, shared Fichte's contempt for what passed for Kantianism at the time. "According to the school definition, a Kantian is only someone who believes that Kant is the truth, and who, if the mail coach from Königsberg were ever to have an accident, might very well have to go without the truth for some weeks. According to the outmoded Socratic concept, which regards as disciples those who have independently made the spirit of the great master their own spirit, have adapted themselves to it, and, as his spiritual sons, have been named after him, there are probably only a very few Kantians" ("Athenaeum Fragments," no. 104, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 30, translation modified). It is presumably this Socratic Kantianism whose maxim Schlegel puts as follows: "The tacitly assumed and real first postulate of all the gospel harmonies of the Kantian evangelists reads as follows: Kant's philosophy must be in agreement with itself" (*ibid.*, no. 107, 30). The paragon of such Socratic Kantianism in Schlegel's eyes was, of course, Fichte, whom Schlegel called "a Kant raised to a second power" (*ibid.*, no. 281, 57). However, Schlegel stressed that the ultimate identity of Fichte's philosophy with Kant's did not immediately meet the eye: "in Fichte one has to look as he does—without paying attention to anything else—only at the whole and at the one thing that really matters. Only in this way can one see and understand the identity of his philosophy with Kant's" (*ibid.*).

21. "Nicht anticipirt wird die Frage von der Harmonie oder Disharmonie Kants und Fichte's erst dann heissen können, wenn eine philosophische Geschichte der Philosophie nicht bloss möglich, sondern auch wenigstens die Gesetze der historischen Kritik für dieselben wirklich entwickelt seyn werden" (Schlegel, "Rezension," in *KFSA*, 8:27).

22. "ob Kant sich auch selbst gerade so verstanden hat" (Schlegel, "Rezension," in *KFSA*, 8:27).

23. "Wenn die Methode auf den Charakter einer Philosophie besonders dann am sichersten schließen läßt, wenn sie entweder so eigentümlich und geistvoll wie die Kantische, oder in ihrer Art so vollkommen, und ein gehorsames Werkzeug in der Hand des Meisters ist, wie die Fichtische: so deutet dies auf Verschiedenheit nicht bloß im Buchstaben, sondern im Geist" (*ibid.*).

24. J. G. Fichte, *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 2–5.

25. "I know full well that Kant has by no means actually constructed a system of this sort. . . . Nevertheless, I am equally certain that Kant has entertained the thought of such a system, that all of the things he has actually presented are fragments and

results of this system, and that his assertions make coherent sense only on this assumption. Perhaps he himself has not thought this system through with sufficient precision and clarity to be able to present it to others; or perhaps he has indeed done so, but simply did not wish to present it to others (as is suggested by certain hints [*Winke*] in his writings): This, it seems to me, is a question that can be left entirely unexplored" (ibid., 62–63). Fichte refuses to choose between these two explanations, but he does cite a passage that may be taken to suggest the latter possibility. However, most of Fichte's readers in Jena, including Friedrich Schlegel, favored the former explanation. One may conjecture that Fichte's inclination to attribute esoteric intentions to Kant was motivated by a deep respect for Kant—or perhaps by Fichte's calculation that his radical claims might encounter less resistance if he avoided criticism of Kant and instead appealed to the latter's implicit teaching.

26. Ibid., 63n.

27. Ibid., 15n.

28. Ibid., 38n, 68.

29. Ibid., 44.

30. Ibid., 56.

31. Ibid., 66–74.

32. Ibid., 59.

33. Ibid., 51.

34. In suggesting that the Fichtean "interpretation according to the spirit" "leaves behind the intention of the author," Ernst Behler overlooks, I think, Fichte's eagerness to keep his revision of Kant in line with the latter's fundamental intentions. This is evident from Fichte's conjecture that Kant might have avoided full representation of his idea on purpose, but also from the lesson drawn by Fichte from Kant's interpretation of Leibniz: "in the case of original philosophical authors, one should interpret their writings in accordance with the spirit *that is really present within them*, which, however, does not mean that one should interpret them in accordance with some 'spirit' that *allegedly should be present within them*" (ibid., 64n).

35. Ibid., 63n. The passages to which Fichte refers are in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, BXLIV, and "On a Discovery," 334.

36. Fichte, *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 52n.

37. Ibid., 35.

38. Quoted by Rüdiger Bubner, "From Fichte to Schlegel," in *The Innovations of Idealism*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 188–189.

39. In a 1797 letter to J. Baggesen Jacobi wrote: "Fichte and Schelling invoke my writings increasingly often, more and more emphatically and extensively, and one sees in the treatises of the latter that my writings have become his very lifeblood [*in Saft und Blut verwandelt*]; along with the matter the words too have stayed with

him. Now I must try to see whether perhaps these men have understood me better than I understood myself and whether through them I can—similarly to them—learn something from myself that is better than what I thought I was teaching, which is by no means impossible” (quoted in Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* [Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995], 73–74, emphasis added).

40. Quoted in Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985), 32.

41. Fichte, *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 70.

42. *Ibid.*, 71.

43. “Gerade dasjenige, was der Autor nicht sagt, wodurch er aber zu allem seinem Sagen kommt, müssen wir ihm sagen; das, was der Autor selbst innerlich, vielleicht seinen eigenen Augen verborgen, *ist*, und wodurch nun alles Gesagte ihm so wird, wie es ihm wird, müssen wir aufdecken,—den *Geist* müssen wir herausziehen aus seinem Buchstaben” (Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 8, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacobs, and Hans Gliwitzky [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964–2012], 279). Note that Fichte no longer writes of the author’s spirit but of spirit pure and simple. Accordingly, the phrase “seinem Buchstaben” can be read as referring to both the letter written by the author and the letter belonging to spirit itself.

3. ESOTERIC ENLIGHTENMENT IN FICHTE

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 142–143.

2. *Ibid.*, 151.

3. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?,” in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11.

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “Of all the faculties of man, reason, which is, so to speak, only a composite of all the others, is the one that develops with the most difficulty and latest. And it is this one which they want to use in order to develop the first faculties! The masterpiece of a good education is to make a reasonable man, and they claim they raise a child by reason! This is to begin with the end, to want to make the product the instrument. If children understood reason, they would not need to be raised” (*Emile or On Education*, trans. Allen Bloom [New York: Basic Books, 1979], 89).

5. Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, 151.

6. As Stanley Rosen puts it, “Enlightenment is impossible without the extirpation of ignorance and superstition. Unfortunately, one man’s light is another man’s darkness. As a consequence, Enlightenment depends upon a restrictive political rule, or

the employment of enforced purification, with or without force of the vulgar sort, but always by means of rhetorical polemic" (*Hermeneutics as Politics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], 33).

7. "Antwort: der leidige Vormund, der als das correlatum des Unmündigen implicite verstanden werden muß" (J. G. Hamann, letter to Christian Jacob Krauss, December 18, 1784, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Josef Nadler [Brockhaus: Wuppertal, 1999], 289).

8. Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and First Satire*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10 (translation modified).

9. In fact, Kant's diagnosis in the first *Critique* of the "paralogisms" of rational psychology gave rise to "an anthropological-philosophical crisis of foundations" that rendered the very discipline of transcendental philosophy problematic. Advocates of both competing candidates for a science of the subject—transcendental philosophy and empirical psychology—tried to invoke the Kantian argument to unmask the dogmatism of the other side, a situation that eventually necessitated reflection on the relationship of reciprocal dependence between the empirical sciences and the transcendental "science of knowledge"; see Temilo von Zantwijk and Paul Ziche, "Fundamentalphilosophie oder empirische Psychologie? Das Selbst und die Wissenschaften bei Fichte und C. C. E. Schmid," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 54, no. 4 (2000): 557–580.

10. Fichte formulates this question with great clarity in the "Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*" (1797) in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 43. Paul Franks distinguishes between two versions of this issue: the "Reality Problem" ("Do the philosopher's thoughts agree with the real actions of the spirit or mind?") and the "Uniqueness Problem" ("Are Fichte's thoughts genuinely expressive of the human mind he shares with others or does he philosophize only for himself?"); see Franks, "The Discovery of the Other: Cavell, Fichte, and Skepticism," *Common Knowledge* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 96.

11. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 114–118.

12. This has been suggested by Stanley Rosen in "Transcendental Ambiguity: The Rhetoric of the Enlightenment," in *Hermeneutics and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 24–26.

13. For about fifteen years, Kant struggled in vain to deduce practical freedom from the spontaneity of our higher cognitive faculties. His eventual recognition that practical autonomy could not be deduced from the spontaneity of the understanding was crucial to the project of the second *Critique*. See Dieter Henrich, "The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason," in *The Unity of Reason*:

Essays on Kant's Philosophy, ed. Richard L. Velkley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 80–82.

14. Henrich, “The Concept of Moral Insight,” 83.

15. *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen [Königlichen Preussischen] Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 5 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902), 4n.

16. Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 276–298.

17. Franks, *All or Nothing*, 300, 326.

18. On how various changes in the publishing industry, reading habits, and political pressures shaped the predicament of intellectuals in Germany during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 273–279.

19. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 4.

20. Woodmansee, *Author, Art and the Market*, 9.

21. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 37.

22. University Press, 1989), 46–51.

23. J. G. Fichte, “First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,” *Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions* (1970), trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 38.

24. Performativity in this sense is a feature that Fichte’s argument shares with Descartes’s, at least if we accept Jaako Hintikka’s interpretation of the latter: “[T]he relation of *cogito* to *sum* is not that of a premise to a conclusion. Their relation is rather comparable with that of a *process* to its *product*. The indubitability of my own existence results from my thinking of it almost as the sound of music results from the playing of it or (to use Descartes’s own metaphor) light in the sense of illumination (*lux*) results from the presence of a source of light (*lumen*)” (“Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?,” in *Descartes, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Willis Doney [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968] 122).

25. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 44.

26. Fichte writes: “The absolute subject, the I, is not given by empirical intuition; it is, instead, posited by intellectual intuition. And the absolute object, the not-I, is that which is posited in opposition to the I. Neither of these occur in empirical consciousness except when a representation is related to them. In empirical consciousness they are both present only indirectly, as the representing subject and as what is

represented. One is never conscious of the *absolute* subject (the representing subject which would not be represented) or of the *absolute* object (a thing in itself, independent of all representation) as something empirically given" ("Review of *Anaesidemus*," in *Early Philosophical Writing*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988], 65).

27. Fichte, "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*," in *Early Philosophical Writings*, 123, 127.

28. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 48.

29. Ibid., 42–44.

30. Ibid., 42. On the difference between the "I," as the act of "intellectual intuition" that stands at the origin of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and the "I" as its ideal outcome, see *ibid.*, 100–101.

31. Ibid., 43.

32. Ibid., 41

33. On Hölderlin's critique of Fichte, see Dieter Henrich, "Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein: Eine Studie zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Idealismus," in *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1791), 47–80. On Novalis's relevant reflections, see Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 113–126.

34. Stanley Rosen, "Freedom and Spontaneity in Fichte," in *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 82.

35. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 90. See also Fichte, "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*," 127.

36. Franks, *All or Nothing*, 315.

37. Ibid., 318.

38. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 49.

39. Ibid., 91–92.

40. Ibid., 90.

41. Ibid., 94.

42. Ibid., 79.

43. Ibid., 95.

44. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allen Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 280.

45. This is one of the few points on which I disagree with Franks's characterization of the Fichtean view of the choice between the idealist assertion of autonomy and the dogmatist belief in heteronomy. Franks claims that the latter involves "no straightforward intellectual error or irrationality that could be demonstrated through some theoretical proof," even though "it is more rational to be autonomous—for only autonomy constitutes an escape from the Agrippan trilemma [between arbitrary

stipulation of a first principle, infinite regress or circularity]" (Franks, *All or Nothing*, 330). In my interpretation, however, Fichte's position implies the irrationality of dogmatism on account of the performative contradiction that Rousseau already noticed but did not fully exploit. Robert Pippin has identified a similar consideration at work in Kant's epistemology to argue against attempts at assimilating Kant's model of the mind to contemporary functionalist accounts ("Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind," in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 37).

46. For the young Schelling's deployment of this argument from performative contradiction see his polemic against materialism in the 1797 "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 83.

47. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 19.

48. Ibid.

49. In his suggestive constellation of Fichte and Cavell, Franks establishes a linkage between the freedom to repudiate autonomy, skepticism about other minds, and esotericism: "if humans are free to repudiate human nature as expressed in the moral law, then they are also free to repudiate human nature as expressed in the higher principle from which Fichte seeks to derive freedom and morality. How does one philosophize about the human condition in the face of the all-too-human capacity for repudiating the human condition, therefore for repudiating philosophy itself?" ("The Discovery of the Other: Cavell, Fichte, and Skepticism," 85). According to Franks, Fichte "lives" the problem of other minds "in his shifting attempts to negotiate his difficulties in making himself intelligible to others, difficulties he considers internal to the very nature of philosophy. One may trace a path from Reinhold's insistence that heteronomy is an essential possibility of the human to the esotericism of Fichte's philosophy" (92).

50. Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 82, *Akademie Ausgabe*, 5:98.

51. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 16.

52. Ibid., 20.

53. J. G. Fichte, "Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge (1794)," in *The Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions*, 162n.

54. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 5–6.

55. Franks, *All or Nothing*, 328–329.

56. F. W. J. Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994], 131–132. The last of his "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism"

closes with a description of transcendental self-reflection as a kind of trial for the separation of the initiates, those who understand, from those who don't: "It is a crime against humanity to hide principles which are universally communicable. But nature herself has set bounds to this communicability. For the worthy she has reserved a philosophy that becomes esoteric by itself because it cannot be learned, recited like a litany, feigned, nor contained in dead words which secret enemies or spies might pick up. This philosophy is a symbol for the union of free spirit, a symbol by which they all recognize each other, and one that they need not hide, since for them alone it is intelligible, whereas for others it will be an eternal riddle" (J. W. F. Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays [1794–1796]*, trans. Fritz Marti [Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980], 196). In the 1800 culmination of his Fichtean period, Schelling characterized intellectual intuition as the "organ" of philosophizing and chalked up philosophical incomprehension to the absence of that organ in some individuals (*System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993], 13–14).

57. Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory," 132. Schelling's repeated use of the phrase "*im Grunde recht haben*" may be read as a pun on the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason ("*Satz von Grund*"), whose hermeneutic significance is explained by Jean Grondin, "Das Leibnizsche Moment in der Hermeneutik," *Die Hermeneutik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, ed. Manfred Beetz and Giuseppe Cacciatore (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 3–16. Grondin points out that the principle of hermeneutic equity propounded by such Leibnizians as Christian Wolff and Chladenius is a descendent of the principle of sufficient reason: it is the assumption that every statement is grounded in a truth informing the speaker's perspective. In view of this connection, I would read Schelling's pun as an allusion to the philosophical yields of a Fichtean understanding of the principle of sufficient reason. The 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* was, among other things, an attempt to work out an issue that had preoccupied Fichte since 1791, i.e., the debate as to whether Leibniz's system could be deduced from a single principle, and in particular, the question of the relation between the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of identity.

58. Fichte writes: "*Leibniz* might also have been convinced [of his philosophy]. For if he is understood correctly—and why should he not be have understood himself correctly?—he is right. [. . .] then perhaps Leibniz was convinced, the only convinced person in the history of philosophy" (*Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 99).

59. The passage from the "Abhandlungen" is one of the extracts from Schelling that Coleridge translated and inserted into chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), thereby inviting later charges of plagiarism (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works*, vol. 7: *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984], 243–244). As an indication of the far-reaching resonances of idealist thought, it should be noted that Coleridge's own interpolations

into these borrowed passages describe the dogmatist's state of willed blindness and paralysis in terms recalling the images of stagnation figuring in his 1798 "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The entire problematic is closely related to the "golden rule" proposed by Coleridge at the beginning of the chapter—"until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding" (*ibid.*, 32)—which echoes Schlegel's *Athenäum* fragment no. 401, and which I will discuss in chapter 4. Coleridge's extensive reading of contemporaneous German authors (especially A. W. Schlegel and Schelling) and his ten-month stay in Göttingen in 1798–1799 are well documented; it is virtually certain that he encountered the *Athenäum* and in it Schlegel's fragment.

60. Franks, "Discovery of the Other," 99.

61. The editorial apparatus of the *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* cites several amusing reactions. Upon the publication of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1800), Reinhold remarked in a letter to Jacobi that Fichte was never more forbiddingly speculative than in his attempt at rising above speculation and acerbically concluded that Fichte just could not abstract from abstraction (*Gesamtausgabe*, 6:155.) When a year later Fichte published a popularizing work with the title *A Crystal Clear Report to the General Public Concerning the Actual Essence of the Newest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the Reader to Understand*, Caroline Michaelis-Schlegel and Schelling composed a mocking motto to the work that played a variation on Tieck's translation of Hamlet: "Zweifle an der Sonne Klarheit, / Zweifle an der Sterne Licht, / Leser, nur an meiner Wahrheit / Und an deiner Dummheit nicht" ("Doubt thou the stars are fire, / Doubt that the sun does move, / Reader, only doubt not my truth / And your dumbness.") Amused by this verse, Goethe immediately requested his protégé's new opus so that he might be "mistreated" by Fichte for a few hours (*Gesamtausgabe*, 7:170).

62. Franks, "Discovery of the Other," 96–97. Franks also suggests that Fichte's "skeptical anxieties about the agreement between his thought (or its linguistic expression) and the thought of others . . . express themselves as the fear that others are mere machines, or that they are members of an alien species of rational beings. Much of Fichte's frenetic intellectual activity can be seen as an attempt to hold those fears at bay without sacrificing his conviction of the truth of his own insights, and without sacrificing his sanity" (*ibid.*, 103).

63. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 89.

64. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 91.

65. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten," in *Fichtes Werke*, vol. 6, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 315.

66. Franks, "Discovery of the Other," 101.

67. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache," in *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, bk. 3, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob and Richard Schottky (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann, 1966), 101.

68. Fichte, "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," 85.

69. See Fichte's letters of June 21 and 22, 1795, Schiller's rejection letter of June 24, Fichte's reply of June 27 and Schiller's draft from August 3–4 in *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol 3, bk. 2. For an account of the conflict see La Vopa, *Fichte*, 269–297. Gadamer claims that the questions in the forefront of the debate were hermeneutical rather than aesthetic or rhetorical; see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 395.

70. The request was denied. See Franks, "Discovery of the Other," 104.

71. Sean Franzel, *Connected by the Ear: The Media, Pedagogy, and Politics of the Romantic Lecture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 43–61 and 91–111.

72. *Ibid.*, 184.

73. Rüdiger Bubner, "From Fichte to Schlegel," *Innovations of Idealism*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189. As Bubner notes, Fichte's most influential work, the 1794 *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, was originally intended to aid students attending Fichte's lectures.

74. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Letter to Reinhold, July 2, 1795, in *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1925), 477–478.

75. Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 198 (*Akademie Ausgabe*, 5:72). On the "spirit" of the social contract and its "letter," see "The Metaphysics of Morals," in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 163.

76. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194 (*Akademie Ausgabe*, 5:316).

77. This becomes possible in moments of "inspiration" (*Begeisterung*) that the writer "soberly" (*nüchtern*) commemorates in a state of "cool self-possession" (*Besonnenheit*), so that this memory (*Andenken*) might bear testimony to what was once immediately felt (Fichte, "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," 79).

78. *Ibid.*, 77.

79. *Ibid.*, 78.

80. As Fichte puts it: "The inspired [*begeisterte*] artist does not address himself at all to our freedom. So little does he do so that, on the contrary, his magic begins only when we have given it up. Through his art he momentarily raises us, through no

agency of our own, to a higher sphere. We do not become any better for it ("On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," 93). For Fichte's claim that the philosopher must be passive vis-à-vis the acts of consciousness that he observes in his experiment see Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 37.

81. Fichte, "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy," 93.

82. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 20.

83. Daniel Breazeale, "The 'Standpoint of Life' and the 'Standpoint of Philosophy' in the Context of the *Jena Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–1801)," in *Transzendentalphilosophie als System: Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen 1794 und 1806*, ed. Albert Mues (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), 89.

84. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 92.

85. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge (1794)," in *The Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions*, 90.

86. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 2.

87. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 202.

88. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 270b–272b.

4. FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL ON TEXTUAL COMMUNICATION

1. The secondary literature on this nexus includes Walter Benjamin's 1919 dissertation "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 120–148; Winfried Menninghaus, *Unendliche Verdopplung: Die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1987); Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2004); and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2008). On Schlegel's productive misunderstanding of Fichte, see Rüdiger Bubner, "From Fichte to Schlegel," in *Innovations of Idealism*, trans. by Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 52n.

3. Schlegel: "F[ichte]s ϕ 2 [Philosophie der Philosophie] ist F[ichte]scher als s. ϕ [Philosophie] also auch besser" ("Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre (1797–1798)" *KFSA*, 18:37.)

4. Schlegel: "Der Geist einer ϕ [Philosophie] ist ihre ϕ 2 [Philosophie der Philosophie]" (ibid.).

5. Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," no. 281, in *Philosophical Fragments*, 57 (translation modified).

6. Schlegel: "F[ichte]s Form ist unendl[ich] viel mehr werth als seine Mat[erie]" ("Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre (1797–1798)" *KFSA*, 18: 37).

7. *Ibid.*, 39.

8. This link is central to the Romantic notion of form in Walter Benjamin's interpretation: every literary form is the articulation of a "peculiar modification of the self-limitation of reflection" ("The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," 158.)

9. "F[ichte]s Polemik ist was die ϕ [Philosophie] darin betrifft, d[er] angewandte Theil seiner ϕ^2 [Philosophie der Philosophie]" (Schlegel, "Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre (1797–1798)," *KFSA*, 18:38).

10. Schlegel: "The sole beginning and the complete ground of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is an act: the totalization of reflective abstraction, a self-construction combined with self-observation, the inner free intuition of I-hood" (Der einzige Anfang und vollständige Grund der Wissenschaftslehre ist eine Handlung: die Totalisierung der reflexiven Abstraktion, eine mit Beobachtung verbundene Selbstkonstruktion, die innre freie Anschauung der Ichheit) ("Rezension von Niethammers philosophischem Journal. 1797," *KFSA*, 8:28).

11. Schlegel: "Philosophy is an experiment, and therefore everyone who wants to philosophize must start anew" (Die Philosophie ist ein Experiment, und daher muß jeder, der philosophieren will, immer von vorne anfangen) (*Transcendentalphilosophie*, ed. Michael Elsässer [Hamburg: Meiner, 1991], 3).

12. Schlegel, "Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen," *KFSA*, 3:47.

13. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Early Philosophical Writing*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 108 (translation modified).

14. *Ibid.*, 127.

15. *Ibid.*, 109.

16. *Ibid.*, 125.

17. *Ibid.*, 126–127.

18. "Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen," 48–49.

19. Bubner, "From Fichte to Schlegel," 193.

20. *Ibid.*, 197.

21. La Vopa, *Fichte*, 368–424.

22. Schlegel: "Man empfängt die WL [Wissenschaftslehre] durch Sinn und Bildung, gar nicht durch Demonstrationen.—Falscher aber allgemeiner Gedanke, daß das Unverständliche durch Erklärung verständlich werden soll" ("Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre (1797–98)," *KFSA*, 18:35.)

23. Schlegel: "Whoever cannot perform this free act is excluded from the region of the *Wissenschaftslehre*" (Wer diese freie Handlung nicht zu handeln vermag, ist aus dem Umkreis der Wissenschaftslehre ausgeschlossen) ("Rezension von Niethammers philosophischem Journal. 1797," *KFSA*, 8:28).

24. Schlegel: "Er [Fichte] idealisirt s[ich] s[eine] Gegner zu vollkommenen Repräsentanten der reinen Unphilosophie" ("Geist der Fichtischen Wissenschaftslehre (1797–98)," 32.); "F[ichte] sagt d[en] Leuten immer bücherlang, daß er eigent[lich] nicht mit ihnen reden wolle noch könne" (ibid., 37).

25. Friedrich Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," no. 70, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 9.

26. Ibid., no. 35, 4.

27. Ibid., no. 85, 10.

28. Ibid., no. 108, 13.

29. Paul Guyer, "Genius and the Canon of Taste: A Second Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment," in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 280.

30. See, for instance, Kant's statements about the self-reproduction of mental activity in pleasure (5:222). In his *Discours sur l'esthétique* (1937), Paul Valéry describes this entwinement of receptivity and activity in aesthetic response as a paradoxical state that typifies "the confusion or interdependence between the observer and the thing observed, which is driving theoretical physicists to despair . . . a pleasure that can stimulate the strange need to produce or reproduce the things, event, object, or state to which it seems attached, and which thus becomes a source of activity without any definite end" (quoted in Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw [Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984], 61). Stanley Corngold's analysis of Kant stresses the initiative of the subject: as "no ascertainable quantity or quality in the aesthetic object determines the manner in which it is read," i.e., conceptually or aesthetically, we must conclude that "aesthetic judgment arises from the mind's intent to manifest itself as aesthetic pleasure" ("What is Radical in Kant's 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment'?" in *Complex Pleasure: Forms of Feeling in German Literature* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998], 56).

31. Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," no. 112, 14.

32. Novalis: "There is no generally valid reading, in the usual sense. Reading is a free operation. No one can prescribe to me how and what I am to read" ("Teplitz Fragments," *Philosophical Writings*, 108).

33. For Fichte's call for interactive pedagogy see J. G. Fichte, *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 92.

34. Friedrich Schlegel, "On Incomprehensibility," in *The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 179 (translation modified).

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 179–180.

37. For Baumgarten's view of confusion see §7 of his "Aesthetica" in Alexander G. Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der 'Ästhetica' [1750/58]*, trans. and ed. Hans Rudolf Schweizer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988), 5.

38. Schlegel: "Je wichtiger die Sache bei *Kant* je tiefer sein Gedanke, desto schlechter verworrrner d[er] Vortrag" (*KFSA*, 18:59).

39. Schlegel: "Confusion ist die Wirkung des Transcendenten (metabasis eis allo genos) worin K[ant] alle andern ϕ [Philosophen] übertrifft.—<Sie liegt nicht in der unvollk[ommenen] Darst[ellung] noch an d[er] Sprache nach Wolf und Leibn[iz] noch an der Neuheit der Ansicht—sondern in d[er] innern Konstruktion" ("Form der Kantischen Philosophie," 62). The ancient Greek term refers to the fallacious transfer of a term from its proper field of application onto another.

40. For Fichte's key move, see "Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre," 275. Fichte's move beyond the reflection-model of consciousness is explained in Dieter Henrich, *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1967). Henrich identifies a precise anticipation of Fichte's argument in Hölderlin's fragment in *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1995)* (Stuttgart: Clett-Cotta, 1995). Frank reconstructs a similar argument in Novalis's notes on Fichte with a view to the aesthetic implications of the critique of the reflection-model; see Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 802–861.

41. Schlegel: "Die Confus[ion] ist aber in ihm wenigstens ordent[lich] construiert; es ist das erste $\phi\sigma$ [philosophische] Kunst $\chi\alpha$ [chaos]" ("Form der Kantischen Philosophie," 62).

42. Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," no. 389, 79.

43. Schlegel: "K[ants] Confusion ist im eigent[lichen] Sinne des Worts unendlich.—Fichte kann noch bis zur absoluten Desorganisazion kommen" ("Form der Kantischen Philosophie," 63). Note that elsewhere Schlegel praises Fichte for the clarity of his presentation.

44. Friedrich Schlegel, "Ideas," in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 247.

45. Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations," in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 31 (translation modified). This dialectic of chaos and clarity has a certain affinity with Hölderlin's roughly contemporaneous claim that *Bildung* has to begin with something unformed and raw, an idea that Schelling will develop in more detail. The key difference is that, unlike Novalis and Schlegel, Hölderlin and Schelling locate this chaotic dimension in nature; see Friedrich Hölderlin, "Der Gesichtspunct aus dem wir das Altertum anzusehen haben," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4, 1st ed. Friedrich Beißner (Stuttgart:

Kohlhammer, 1961), 221–222; and F. W. J. Schelling, “Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur,” in *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 7, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1860), 324–326.

46. Friedrich Schlegel, “On Incomprehensibility,” 180,

47. Here I propose to amend Peter Firchow’s English translation, which suggests that Schlegel is deriving “the purest and most genuine” incomprehensibility from four distinct sources: science, the arts, philosophy, and philology. Schlegel’s formulation is more plausibly construed as dealing with (a) the science that is philosophy and (b) the art that is philology: “dass man die reinste und gediegenste Unverständlichkeit gerade aus der Wissenschaft und aus der Kunst erhält, die ganz eigentlich aufs Verständigen und Verständlichmachen ausgehn, aus der Philosophie und Philologie” (Schlegel, “Über die Unverständlichkeit,” *KFSA*, 3:531).

48. Novalis, “Monolog,” in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 214.

49. Benjamin, “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism, 139–140.

50. Recently J. M. Bernstein has criticized Jena romanticism as well as its appropriations by Blanchot and de Man for espousing an undifferentiated (anti)metaphysics of language. Bernstein writes: “[T]he aim of romantic discourse, as exemplified in the romantic fragment, is emphatically to express the essence of language, indeed the essence of human freedom, as the essence of poetry. Hence, even in the unworking of the romantic fragment, precisely in its not being a work, there emerges a reflexivity and essentialism that cannot be anything else but knowledge—without that emergence there is nothing to experience in the fragment. Eschewing aesthetic semblance, the romantic fragment becomes philosophical idea. Both de Man and Blanchot, in wanting to get to the non-meaning that is the condition of meaning, call it text machine, call it event, must displace, forever, the fragile aesthetic object and replace it with, however mediated and detoured, philosophical knowing, the knowing of non-knowledge. But this is metaphysics in the bad old sense, since it is pure knowledge of the absence of meaning, dependent on no particular objects for its presence or absence. This is why it is an ideology of finitude: it is the knowledge of the finitude of meaning without finite beings, the unworking of works but without there being any works, no significant stone that might reveal silent stone. There is in all this something too knowing and comforting, as if the loss of meaning would be tolerable after all if we could so possess it, have it, so surely, authentically, stoically, and beautifully. A beautiful death after all” (“Poesy and the Arbitrariness of the Sign: Notes For a Critique of Jena Romanticism,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis [London: Routledge, 2009], 167–168). Although Bernstein correctly identifies a danger of romantic irony, the aim of my reconstruction of Schlegel’s notion of criticism has been to identify a strand in his writings that enables us to steer clear of that pitfall. Whether Bernstein does justice to de Man and Blanchot is another matter.

51. Michel Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 23–29.

52. Schlegel: “Man muß sehr viel Verstand haben, um manches nicht zu verstehen” (“Zur Philosophie. 1797,” *KFSa*, 18:114.)

53. Schlegel: “Bei der höchsten Klarheit dialektischer Werke im Einzelnen muß wenigstens die Verknüpfung des Ganzen auf etwas Unauflösliches führen, wenn wir sie noch für Nachbildung des Philosophierens oder des endlosen Sinnens erkennen sollen; denn nur das hat Form, was sich selbst bedeutet, wo die Form den Stoff symbolisch reflektiert” (*KFSa*, 3:100). Only a page earlier Schlegel suggested that the proper form of philosophy is not so much symbolical as allegorical: “Hence finally the allegory in the expression of the fully accomplished positive philosophies” (Daher endlich die Allegorie im Ausdruck der vollendeten positiven Philosophien) (*ibid.*, 99).

54. Schlegel, “Athenaeum Fragments,” no. 53, 24.

55. Schlegel: “Um jemand zu verstehn muß man erst[lich] klüger seyn als er, dann eben so klug und dann auch eben so dumm. Es ist nicht genug daß man d[en] eigent[lichen] Sinn eines konfusen Werkes besser versteht, als der Autor es verstanden hat. Man muss auch die Konfusion selbst bis auf die Prinzipien kennen, *charakterisieren* und selbst *construiren* können” (“Form der Kantischen Philosophie,” *KFSa*, 18:63).

56. Schlegel, “Athenaeum Fragments,” no. 401, 81. A variant of this idea can be found in Novalis’s characterization of the mode of translation he terms “modifying” (“verändernde”), as opposed to the “grammatic” and “mythic” modes. In a modifying translation, the translator simultaneously renders his own idea of the translated author and the latter’s self-understanding: “The true translator of this kind . . . must be the poet of the poet and thus be able to let him speak according to his own and the poet’s idea *at the same time*” (Novalis, “Miscellaneous Observations,” 33–34).

57. See Bollnow, “Was heisst, einen Schriftsteller besser zu verstehen”; Heinrich Nüsse, *Die Sprachtheorie Friedrich Schlegels* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962), 92–95; E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 19–20; Kurt Müller-Vollmer, “To understand an author better than the author himself,” *Language and Style* 5 (Winter 1971): 43–52; Ernst Behler, “What It Means to Understand an Author Better than He Understood Himself: Idealistic Philosophy and Romantic Hermeneutics,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift in Honor of René Wellek*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (Bern: Peter Lang, 1984), 70–72. Behler notes that Schleiermacher himself paid homage to Schlegel in introducing the principle of “understanding an author better than he understood himself” as the “paradoxical dictum” of a recently deceased “first-rate” thinker.

58. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 175–195.

59. *Ibid.*, 259n.

60. Only after the publication of *Truth and Method* did Gadamer discover an

"anticipation" of his position in Schlegel's writings, as he later wrote. See his "Frühromantik, Hermeneutik, Dekonstruktivismus," in *Aktualität der Frühromantik*, ed. Behler and Hörisch (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), esp. 254–225.

61. On this difference, see Heinrich Nüsse, *Die Sprachtheorie Friedrich Schlegels* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1962), 93–95. According to Nüsse, Schleiermacher's adoption of the Schlegelian formula distorted its meaning by making "better understanding" the end goal of interpretation, whereas in Schlegel's version it is only the starting point. As a consequence: "Schlegel's subtle call for 'understanding just as well,' in heeding which the genuine virtuosity of the historically affected mind proves itself, has gone lost in the history of hermeneutics" (*ibid.*, 95). Harald Schnur also notes the difference in temporal order between the two conceptions in his study *Schleiermachers Hermeneutik und ihre Vorgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Bibelauslegung, zu Hamann, Herder und F. Schlegel* (Weimar: Metzler, 1994), 150.

62. Schlegel: "Denn wie auch das Förmlichste und Abstrakteste, besonders in der praktischen Philosophie auch der größten Eklektiker, gewöhnlich nur die Darstellung ihrer Individualität ist: so gibt oft das scheinbar Persönlichste in den Äusserungen des ächten Idealisten tiefen Aufschluß über sein System" ("Rezension von Niethammers philosophischen Journal. 1797," 28).

63. Friedrich Schlegel, "Lucinde," in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 48.

64. Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," no. 242, 51 (translation modified).

65. *Ibid.*, no. 117, 32.

66. *Ibid.*, no. 121, 33 (translation modified). Note that the English-language edition renders the phrase "Chinesischen Bonzen" as "Chinese bronzes."

67. Schlegel: "Die philosophische Läuterung und Prüfung der Geschichte und Überlieferung ist unstreitig Kritik; aber eben das ist ebenso unstreitig auch jede historische Ansicht der Philosophie" ("Vom Wesen der Kritik," *KFSA* 3:60).

68. Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," 10.

69. Schlegel, "Vom Wesen der Kritik," *KFSA*, 3:60.

70. Schlegel: "One can summarize the solid results of a historical mass in a concept or one can, for the sake of differentiation, not only determine a concept but construct it in its becoming, from its first origin until its final perfection, giving alongside the concept the inner history of the concept; these two are a characteristic, the highest task of critique and the most intimate marriage of history and philosophy" (*ibid.*, 20).

71. "One should think of critique as the middle term between history and philosophy which connects the two, in which the two must be united to a new third term" (Man denke sich die Kritik als ein Mittelglied der Historie und der Philosophie, das beide verbinden, in dem beide zu einem neuen Dritten vereinigt werden sollen) (*ibid.*, 60).

72. Schlegel: "A project is the subjective germ of a developing object. A perfect project should be at once completely subjective and completely objective, should be an indivisible and living individual. In its origin: completely subjective and original, only possible in precisely this sense; in its character: completely objective, physically and morally necessary" ("Athenaeum Fragments," 20–21).

73. "What is essential is to be able to idealize and realize objects immediately and simultaneously: to complete them and in part carry them out within oneself" (ibid., 21).

74. "Kritik ist eigentlich nichts als Vergleichung des Geistes und des Buchstabens eines Werkes, welches als Unendliches, als Absolutum und Individuum behandelt wird.—Kritisieren heißt einen Autor besser verstehen als er sich selbst verstanden hat" (KFSA, 16:168).

75. On this particular point my reconstruction is opposed to Ernst Behler's. In discussing the *Athenäum* fragment no. 401, Behler relegates the first moment, that of better understanding, to an instantaneous exercise of everyday semantic competence (*eine alltägliche Allerweltsangelegenheit*), and describes the second step (understanding an author as he understood himself) as a far more demanding hermeneutic challenge, indeed as an "endless task." However, the notion that the ultimate aim of interpretation is capturing the author's self-understanding seems incompatible with the progressive orientation of Schlegelian critique, which Behler himself emphasizes; see Behler, *Frühromantik* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1992), 273–274.

76. Schlegel: "thus I would venture to claim that Lessing, although he would not have been able to characterize himself, nevertheless knew himself to an extraordinary degree" (so wage ichs zu behaupten, daß Lessing, obgleich er nicht fähig gewesen wäre sich selbst zu charakterisieren, sich doch in einem vorzüglichen Grade kannte) ("Über Lessing," in KFSA, 2:114).

77. Ibid., 104.

78. Ibid., 111.

79. Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," no. 75, 27.

80. "Wer den *Nathan* recht versteht, kennt Lessing" ("Über Lessing," 118).

81. I am thinking of Proust's polemic in "Against Sainte-Beuve" and remarks by Walter Benjamin such as this: "the sole rational connection between creative artist and work of art consists in the testimony that the latter gives about the former. Not only does one gain knowledge of the essence of a human being through his outward manifestations (and in this sense the works, too, are a part of his essence); no, such knowledge is determined first and foremost by the works. Works, like deeds, are non-derivable, and every reflection that acknowledges this principle in general so as to contradict it in particular has given up all pretention to content" ("Goethe's Elective Affinities," in *Selective Writings*, 1:321).

82. Umberto Eco, "Overinterpreting Texts," in *Interpretation and Overinterpreta-*

tion: Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 61–62.

83. Quoted in *ibid.*, 62.

84. Umberto Eco, “Between Author and Text,” in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 70.

85. Eco borrows the term “liminal author” from his student Mauro Ferraresi (*ibid.*, 69). The objective counterpart of this term may be found in what the young Walter Benjamin called “the poeticized” (*das Gedichtete*) of a poem. Benjamin defines this “limit concept” as “the transition from the functional unity of life to that of the poem,” where life figures only as an artistically determined “task” to which the poem is the solution (Walter Benjamin, “Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin,” trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings*, 1:19–20).

86. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

87. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 232.

88. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 33 and 36.

89. Umberto Eco, “Interpretation and History,” in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 23. On this dialectic and its broader cultural implications see Sándor Radnóti, “In Defense of Interpretation, or the Function of Practical Criticism Revisited,” *Arcadia* 35, no. 1 (2000): 25–44.

90. Eco adds, “I am not ashamed to admit that I am so defining the old and still valid ‘hermeneutic circle’” (“Overinterpreting Texts,” 64).

91. *Ibid.*, 66.

92. Eco, “Between Author and Text,” 69.

93. Richard Rorty, “The Pragmatist’s Progress,” in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 107.

94. Michel Chaouli, “Criticism and Style,” *New Literary History* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 333.

95. Walter Benjamin, “Goethe’s Elective Affinities,” trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings*, 1: 339–340.

96. Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 51. In the original: “und Hingabe mit Erkenntnis—eben dies ist Passion. . . . Aber die Beschäftigung mit ihr wird beinahe zum Laster, sie wird *moralisch*, wird zur rücksichtslos ethischen Hingabe an das Schädliche und Verzehrende, wenn sie nicht gläubig-enthusiastisch, sondern mit Analyse verquickt ist, deren gehässigste Erkenntnisse zuletzt eine Form der Verherrlichung und wiederum nur Ausdruck der Leidenschaft sind” (Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* [Frankfurt: Fischer, 2001], 92.)

97. Thus I would read Maurice Blanchot’s claims that the reader, turned “funda-

mentally anonymous,” “relieves” the book of its author, and that “the book . . . needs the reader if it is to declare itself a thing without an author and hence without a reader,” as suggestive hyperbolic formulations that illuminate *one* side of the truth (*The Space of Literature*, tr. Ann Smock [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989], 193–194).

5. EXOTERIC ENLIGHTENMENT IN HEGEL

1. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates. Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 180–181. Key passages in Nietzsche include section 14 of *The Birth of Tragedy* and the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* as well as aphorism no. 190 in the latter book.

2. Hans Robert Jauss, “Der dialogische und der dialektische ‘Neveu de Rameau’ (oder: Wie Diderot Sokrates und Hegel Diderot rezipierte),” in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982). The English translation referenced in this chapter is Hans Robert Jauss, “The dialogic and the dialectic Neveu de Rameau; or, The reciprocity between Diderot and Socrates, Hegel and Diderot,” in *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

3. M. M. Bakhtin, “From Notes Made in 1970–71,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 147, 162. For Jauss’s comments on Bakhtin, see “The Dialogic and the Dialectic Neveu de Rameau,” 120.

4. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 7.

5. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 317.

6. The *locus classicus* of Schlegel’s Socratism is no. 108 of the “Critical Fragments,” where Schlegel describes the “feeling of indissoluble antagonism . . . between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” as the most important effect of Socratic irony. For the complaint about Plato’s monologism, see this entry from the notes “On the Form of Kantian Philosophy”: “<Warum ist bei Plato so viel Monolog, so wenig Dialog?—Nur der wahre kf[kritische Philosoph] kann wahre Dialoge schreiben” (KFSA, 18:61).

7. The difference between the position of Diderot as a *philosophe* writing in an absolutist society and Hegel’s perspective as an academic philosopher in a postrevolutionary setting is noted by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in his response to Jauss; see Gumbrecht, “Dialectics, or Authoritative Monologue in Dialogue Disguise,” in *Protocol of the Forty Fifth Colloquy: 27 February 1983*, ed. William R. Herzog II (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1983), 34. See also Rüdiger Bubner’s comments on

Fichte's break with the convention of lecturing from compendia based on canonical works in "From Fichte to Schlegel," in *Innovations of Idealism*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189.

8. See the *Athäneum* fragment no. 149: "The systematic Winckelmann who read all the ancients as if they were a single author, who saw everything as a whole and concentrated all his powers on the Greeks, provided the first basis for a material knowledge of the ancients through his perception of the absolute difference between ancient and modern. Only when the perspective and the conditions of the absolute identity of ancient and modern in the past, present and future have been discovered will one be able to say that at least the contours of classical study are finished [*fertig sei*] and one can now proceed to methodical execution [*Ausführung*]" (J. M. Bernstein ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 250). I have modified P. Firchow's translation, which by rendering *fertig* as "laid bare" and *Ausführung* as "investigation" creates the misleading impression that Schlegel thinks of the contours and contents of the science he has in mind as waiting to be discovered rather than being created.

9. Jauss, "The Dialogic and the Dialectic Neveu de Rameau," 143.

10. As Hegel puts it in §5 of the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be actual knowing—that is what I have set myself to do" (3).

11. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 66. For Hegel's proposal to mistrust, see §74 in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 47.

12. See Hegel's key claim in §87 of the introduction to the *Phenomenology* that the speculative significance of experience is concealed from the natural consciousness undergoing experience and is only accessible "for us" (56).

13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 90–91. See also *Theorie Werkausgabe*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 326.

14. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 7, §13. On Hegel's abandonment of esotericism in favor of an exoteric conception of philosophy see Michael N. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 107–108. See also Bill Bristow, "Bildung and the Critique of Modern Skepticism in McDowell and Hegel," in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 2005, vol. 3 (New York/Bonn: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 197–199.

15. For Hegel's concept of Spirit as a recognitive community, see Hegel's preliminary definition in §177: "A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object.' With this, we already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance

which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (*Phenomenology*, 110).

16. See Hegel's claim about the individual in §489: "His true original nature and substance is the alienation of himself as Spirit from his natural being. This externalization is, therefore, both the purpose and the existence of the individual; it is at once the means, or the transition, both of the [mere] thought-form of substance into actuality, and, conversely, of the specific individuality into essentiality. This individuality molds itself by culture into what it intrinsically is, and only by so doing is it an intrinsic being that has an actual existence; the measure of its culture is the measure of its actuality and power. Although here the self knows itself as this self, yet its actuality consists solely in the setting-aside of its natural self" (*Phenomenology*, 298).

17. F. W. J. Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge (1797)," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 132. See also F. W. J. Schelling, "Abhandlungen zur Erläuterungen des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre," in *Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Wilhelm G. Jacobs and Walter Schieche (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988), 169.

18. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 331, §545. I have changed Miller's translation of *rubige Ausdehnung* from "silent expansion" to "peaceful expansion." For reasons that should become clear from the ensuing discussion, I find it crucial to Hegel's account that the expansion in question is calm but not silent.

19. *Ibid.*, 331. It appears likely that this passage indirectly influenced the description of syphilitic infection as a source of diabolical inspiration in the composer Adrian Leverkühn's dialogue with the devil in chapter 25 of Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus*; see Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn As Told By a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York, Vintage, 1999), 249–250. As is well known, in writing the novel Mann received extensive guidance from Adorno, an expert reader of Hegel. The calm diffusion of Hegel's metaphor for the Enlightenment into Mann's notoriously problematic parallelism between Nazism and modernist art raises difficult questions that cannot be pursued here. At issue in both contexts is a cornerstone of the German ideology (to use the Marxian shorthand), namely, the idea that the bypassing of political revolution in Germany's antipolitical culture allowed for a more profound, and thus more profoundly subversive, version of the Enlightenment than the one that played out in France. On the importance of this issue for Hegel, see Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). In the context of a fictional biography of a modern composer, Mann's likely borrowing from Hegel's adaptation of Diderot appears all the more apposite since the original passage in Diderot's dialogue deals with the unstoppable ascent of "new

music" (*la nouvelle musique*), that is, with the displacement of French opera by Italian operatic and symphonic music; and indeed the fictional exchange in the context of which Mann develops his variation upon the Hegelian passage about surreptitious infection takes place in Italy.

20. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 319–324, §525–530.

21. *Ibid.*, 345, §565.

22. Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and First Satire*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2006), 67.

23. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 338, §545. In the context of the so-called *Fragments* dispute, Lessing pointed out that the orthodox theologian Johann Melchior Goeze did not remain "uninfected" (unangesteckt) by the "heterodoxy" of his enemy Hermann Samuel Reimarus. Hegel's allusion is noted by the editors of the *Meiner* edition (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont [Hamburg: Meiner, 2006], 606).

24. This discourse is analyzed in Albert Koschorke, *Körpertströme und Schriftverkehr: Mediologie des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1999), 52. For an example of this use of the metaphor of contagion, see Johann Gottfried Hoche's 1794 admonition about the epidemic of compulsive reading: "Die Lesesucht ist ein thörichter, schädlicher Mißbrauch einer sonst guten Sache, ein wirklich großes Übel, das so *ansteckend* ist, wie das gelbe Fieber in Philadelphia . . . Verstand und Herz gewinnt nichts dabei, weil das Lesen mechanisch wird; der Geist verwildert an statt veredelt zu werden" (*Vertraute Briefe über die jetzige abentheuerliche Lesesucht und über den Einfluß derselben auf die Verminderung des häuslichen und öffentlichen Glücks* [Hannover: Christian Ritscher, 1794], 68, emphasis added).

25. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 308–309, §508.

26. *Ibid.*, 430, §710.

27. The linkage between the two occurrences of the metaphor of infection is also noted by Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Verso, 2010), 94.

28. For the general point, see §312 in the "Reason" chapter (*Phenomenology*, 187). The notion of externalization that governs Hegel's thinking about language precludes the sort of emphasis on the materiality of language that one finds in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: "From the outset 'spirit' is cursed with the 'burden' of matter, which appears in this case in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and thus as it first really exist for myself as well" ("The German Ideology," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. T. Bottomore and M. Rubel [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963], 85–86).

29. See Hegel's thesis about "language as the existence of Spirit" §652 (*Phenom-*

enology, 395) and his account of the “continuity” of absolute Spirit at the end of the “Conscience” chapter in §667–671 (*ibid.*, 405–409).

30. For Hegel’s conception of life in relation to self-consciousness, see *Phenomenology*, 106–109, §168–173. On the structural analogy between life and self-consciousness, see Brady Bowman, “Kraft und Verstand: Hegels Übergang zum Selbstbewußtsein in der Phänomenologie des Geistes,” in *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne*, ed. Klaus Vieweg and Wolfgang Wiesch (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 153–168.

31. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 106, §168. On Hegel’s conception of “infinity” and “absolute difference” see my discussion in the introduction.

32. *Ibid.*, 108–109, §172–173.

33. This is not, or not primarily, a genetic claim about the precondition of *becoming* self-conscious but an ontological claim about the precondition of *being* self-conscious.

34. Hegel develops the relation between the animal’s feeling of self and self-consciousness proper in the section on “Observation of Nature” (*ibid.*, 157, §257–258)

35. The term *anthropological* can be used only in a qualified sense to characterize Hegel’s insight. As I note in the Introduction, Hegel’s resolute rejection of the idea of a finite human standpoint fixed by natural parameters is one of the decisive commitments motivating his criticism of Kant.

36. The dialectic of self-consciousness (IV) and its higher-level reiteration in the dialectic of active reason (V/B) could be reconstructed as a progression of pronominally defined standpoints: first-person singular, second-person singular, third-person singular, first-person plural.

37. The relevant passage by Diderot reads: “They’d imagined that they could regularly let the public experience with what ease, flexibility, and fluidity the harmony and metre of the Italian tongue, with its ellipses and inversions, adapt themselves to the art, movement, expression, and structure of the songs and the measured rhythm of the sounds, and that they’d still fail to notice how stiff, hollow, heavy, unwieldy, pedantic, and monotonous is their own tongue” (Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew and First Satire*, 66).

38. As Jauss pointedly observes vis-à-vis Hegel’s discussion of the nephew’s dirempted language, “[t]he new figure in the process of the construction of consciousness, that which resolves the antagonism between magnanimous and spiteful consciousness, emerges—at the ‘true middle’ between the extremes of state power and wealth’—out of the spirit of language!” (“The Dialogic and the Dialectic *Neveu de Rameau*,” 139).

39. *Ibid.*, 141.

40. The difference between *Bildung* as estrangement and as an organic process is noted by Jauss in the transcript of the 1983 Berkeley colloquy on his essay; see “Minutes of the Colloquy of 27 February 1983,” 65.

41. Rameaus Neffe: *Ein Dialog von Denis Diderot, übersetzt von Goethe, zweisprachige Ausgabe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1996), 162–163 and Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 318, §523. Monosyllabic language will recur in the “flat, commonplace monosyllable” (*Platttheit dieser Silbe*) of the death sentence meted out by the revolutionary tribunal (*ibid.*, 360, §591). This affinity between the language of naïve, unenlightened decency and that of revolutionary terror is a key instance of Hegel’s version of the dialectic of Enlightenment.

42. Rameaus Neffe, 162–163 and Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 332, §545.

43. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 409, §671.

44. *Ibid.*, 331, §545.

45. Jauss, “The Dialogic and the Dialectic *Le Neveu de Rameau*,” 137–138.

46. M. M. Bakhtin, “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” in *The Dialectical Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 46, 62.

47. John H. Smith, “Response by John H. Smith,” in Herzog II, *Protocol of the Forty Fifth Colloquy: 27 February 1983*, 48.

48. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 54, §85.

49. *Ibid.*, 56, §87. The tension between the two requirements is a lynchpin of both Heidegger’s and Adorno’s reflections on the *Phenomenology*; see Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 128–129, 153; and Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 6, 92–95, 139–141. Other discussions of this issue include Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 175–179; Werner Marx, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Commentary Based On the Preface and Introduction*, trans. Peter Heath (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 78–97; and Ludwig Siep, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 68.

50. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 492, §807.

51. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 183. Kojève describes Hegel as the first in a lineage of dialectical auditors-historians-philosophers—presumably including Heidegger and Kojève himself—who offer alternatives to the Augustinian paradigm of dialogue with oneself that prevailed from Descartes through Kant to Fichte and Schelling.

52. Jauss, “The Dialogic and the Dialectic *Le Neveu de Rameau*,” 140.

53. Jauss, “Minutes of the Colloquy of 27 February 1983,” 65.

54. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 110, §177.

55. *Ibid.*, 405–409, §666–671.

56. *Ibid.*, 492, §808.

57. Hegel's *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), 759; quoted in Robert B. Pippin, "Gadamer's Hegel: Subjectivity and Reflection," in *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97n.

58. Heidegger draws attention to the etymological meaning of "dialogue" to argue that consciousness, as Hegel presents it in the *Phenomenology*, is a conversation between the "ontic-preontological" knowledge of natural consciousness and the "ontological" knowledge that defines Spirit (Heidegger, "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung," 183–184). I am suggesting that, in addition to what one might call the vertical dialogue noted by Heidegger, the "Spirit" chapter also develops dialogues unfolding horizontally, on the level of the observed figures of Spirit.

CONCLUSION

1. Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ix.

2. For the reference to Hegel, see John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), ix.

3. Ibid., 8.

4. John McDowell, "Hegel's Idealism as Radicalization of Kant," in *Having the World in View: Essays On Kant, Hegel and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). This essay from 2001 elaborates an account of Hegel's response to Kant, inspired by Robert Pippin's interpretation, that departs in important ways from the account sketched out in *Mind and World*, mainly influenced by P. F. Strawson's reading of Kant. In his 1994 book, McDowell's diagnosis of Kant centered on Kant's distinction between the immanent viewpoint of experience and a standpoint of transcendental-philosophical reflection that ultimately had to be thought of as *transcendent* to experience (McDowell, *Mind and World*, 41–44). In an essay from 1998, McDowell distances himself from this element of his earlier reading of Kant and repudiates the view that transcendental philosophy requires a transcendent standpoint (McDowell, "Sellars On Perceptual Experience," *Having the World in View*, 18n26). My account here is based on the interpretation of Kant that McDowell presents in his later, more narrowly focused essays. That later interpretation remains consistent with the over-all framework of *Mind and World*.

5. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 86. McDowell is quoting, via Rorty, §133 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

6. Ibid., 89. See also McDowell, "On Pippin's Postscript," in *Having the World in View*, 187.

7. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 97.

8. Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (New York/Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 316.

9. In this respect McDowell's account of receptivity has important affinities with Nikolas Kompridis's Heidegger-inspired recasting of Habermas's critical theory, a central element of which is the rethinking of the notion of receptivity as openness to the disclosure of possibilities, and especially to the critical potential of the traditions from which we can never fully disengage. As Kompridis puts it, this notion "does not eliminate activity so much as it makes receptivity active, reflective," in order thereby to "undo the damage done by conflating receptivity with passivity, particularly the idea that being receptive is akin to being mindless, to being in a state of unmindedness" (*Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future* [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006], 203).

10. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 9.

11. John McDowell, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," in *Having the World in View*, 43–144.

12. Ibid.

13. On the Hegelian equipoise, see McDowell, "Hegel's Idealism as Radicalization of Kant," 75.

14. This demarcation is central to McDowell's partial disagreement with the readings of Hegel advanced by Robert Pippin and Robert Brandom. See John McDowell, "Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint," in *Having the World in View*, 105–106 and "On Pippin's Postscript," in *Having the World in View*, 201–203.

15. Ibid., 203.

16. McDowell writes, "the dictates of reason are there anyway, whether or not one's eyes are opened to them; that is what happens in a proper upbringing. We need not try to understand the thought that the dictates of reason are objects of an enlightened awareness, except from within the way of thinking such an upbringing initiates one into: a way of thinking that constitutes a standpoint from which those dictates are already in view" (*Mind and Word*, 91–92; see also 34, 82). In a later essay, McDowell returns to this point: "If self-legislation of rational norms is not to be a random leap in the dark, it must be seen as an acknowledgment of an authority that the norms have anyway. Submitting to that authority is not handing over control of the relevant areas of one's life to a foreign power. What controls one's life is still in oneself, in whatever it is about one that enables one to recognize that the norms are authoritative. But their authority is not a creature of one's recognition. . . . Fundamental norms for thinking cannot be seen as instituted by thinkers; as soon as one is a thinker, one is already subject to such norms. And there is a mystery in the idea that individuals who are not yet thinkers could convert themselves into thinkers by instituting norms that are constitutive of thinking as such. If they are not yet thinkers, how can we make sense of their being able to legislate such norms for themselves?" ("Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint," 105–106).

17. This line of reasoning behind McDowell's "naturalized Platonism" converges

with Thomas Nagel's argument in *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

18. See especially McDowell's elaborations on Jonathan Lear's and Bernard Williams's readings of Wittgenstein as an idealist in *Mind and World*, 159.

19. For Hegel's assertion see *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 47, §7. For McDowell's formulation see "On Pippin's Postscript," 197. The characterization of the Wittgensteinian thought as a "platitude" is McDowell's own.

20. McDowell, "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's Phenomenology," in *Having the World in View*, 152.

21. In a 2003 article, McDowell states that his objective is to show that "Hegelian rhetoric can be domesticated, it can be interpreted as expressive of a philosophical outlook that is precisely protective of the ordinary realism of common sense" ("Hegel and the Myth of the Given," in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch and Klaus Vieweg [Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003], 78). See also *Mind and World*, 44. On McDowell's domestication of Hegel, see Robert Stern, "Going Beyond the Kantian Philosophy: On McDowell's Hegelian Critique of Kant," *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 260–261. See also Michael Quante, *Die Wirklichkeit des Geistes: Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2011), 37–88.

22. The claim that Hegel rejected the law of noncontradiction is not uncontroversial. For interpretations endorsing that claim see Dieter Henrich, "Erkundung im Zugzwang: Ursprung, Leistung und Grenzen von Hegels Denken des Absoluten," in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch and Klaus Vieweg (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 25–28; and Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 113–121. For an account according to which Hegel, "far from rejecting the law of noncontradiction . . . radicalizes it, and places it at the very center of his thought," see Robert Brandom, "Holism and Idealism in Hegel's Phenomenology," in *Das Interesse des Denkens*, 48. See also Robert Pippin, "Hegel's Metaphysics and the Problem of Contradiction," in *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 239–252.

23. McDowell, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," 144. See also McDowell, *Mind and World*, 70.

24. Pico Della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 4.

25. In a response to Robert Pippin written in 2007, McDowell claims that "[w]e need not seek to show that programmes for bringing thought and action within the scope of natural science *cannot* be executed" ("On Pippin's Postscript," 187). Without some argument about the limits of natural science along the broad lines I propose,

however, it is difficult to see what keeps McDowell's brand of idealism from collapsing into common sense. Indeed, in *Mind and World* he takes pains to distinguish evolutionary accounts of how responsiveness to meaning *emerged* from a (hypothetical) "constitutive account" of what such responsiveness *is* or what it *consists in*. McDowell dismisses the very idea of an account of the latter type, "whose point would be to make the relevant sort of intelligibility safe for a naturalism without second nature," as "misbegotten" (*Mind and World*, 124). In thus recognizing the limits of constructive philosophy, McDowell should not be taken to claim that naturalistic explanation can do the work previously expected of constitutive inquiry.

26. This point about the inability of the natural-scientific worldview to establish its own normative foundations should not be confused with the stronger, and highly problematic, argument (most influentially advanced by Alvin Plantinga) that that worldview undermines itself.

27. For the criticism that *Mind and World* is a work of constructive philosophy see Charles Larmore, "Attending to Reasons," in *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, ed. Nicholas Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 198.

28. McDowell's awareness of the historically specific character of his own thinking is evident in his assertion that "the need for reconciliation" envisioned by him "arises at a particular period in the history of ideas," one dominated by a narrowly defined naturalism (*Mind and World*, 85). It also motivates McDowell's objection that the constructivism about social norms entailed by Pippin's interpretation of Hegel signals "an avoidance of the real difficulty of understanding oneself as a modern subject," inasmuch as it cannot (according to McDowell) adequately address the sense of "groundlessness" and the "anxiety of responsibility" to which modern subjects are prone. See McDowell, "Towards a Reading of Hegel On Action," in *Having the World in View*, 183–184.

29. Hegelian dialectic aside, the other major paradigm of the logic of self-overcoming that I have in mind is the one outlined by Nietzsche in the penultimate section of *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of necessary 'self-overcoming' in the essence of life—the lawgiver himself is always ultimately exposed to the cry: 'patere legem, quam ipse tulisti.' In this way, Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality, in the same way Christianity as a morality must also be destroyed—we stand on the threshold of this occurrence. After Christian truthfulness has drawn one conclusion after another, it will finally draw the strongest conclusion, that against itself; this will, however, happen when it asks itself, 'What does all will to truth mean?' . . . and here I touch on my problem again, on our problem, my unknown friends (—because I don't know of any friend as yet): what meaning does our being have, if it were not that that will to truth has become conscious of itself as a problem in us?" (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 119).

30. As McDowell puts it, “being at home in the space of reasons includes a standing obligation to be ready to rethink the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that constitute the space of reasons as one conceives it at any time” (*Mind and World*, 186).

31. Wittgenstein’s image in §41 of *On Certainty* is quoted by McDowell in “Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action,” in *Having the World in View*, 168.

32. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 81 and 187.

33. The reconciliation to which McDowell aspires is of course far less ambitious: “the need for reconciliation that I envisage,” as he writes in *Mind and World*, “arises at a particular period in the history of ideas, one in which our thought tends, intelligibly, to be dominated by a naturalism that constricts the idea of nature” (85).

34. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §670, 441.

35. Bernard Williams, “Wittgenstein and Idealism,” in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 160. Williams’s formulation occurs in the context of a reading of Wittgenstein. For an interpretation of Wittgenstein that develops the angle proposed by Williams and highlights its affinity with Hegel’s project see Jonathan Lear, “The Disappearing ‘We,’” *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 300.

36. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 82–83. See also McDowell’s distinctly un-Hegelian-sounding remarks about our animal nature and his appreciative remark (in a footnote) about Freud’s insight into “unassimilated residues” of first nature within mature human consciousness (*ibid.*, 183).

37. Bill Bristow, “*Bildung* and the Critique of Modern Skepticism in McDowell and Hegel,” in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 3 (2005): 190–191.

38. *Ibid.*, 202. For the key passages in Hegel, see *Phenomenology*, §489, 298.

39. Thus, in the first half of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel first tracks the self-subversion of receptive models of knowledge (“Consciousness” chapter), then the self-subversion of models that conceive knowledge as spontaneous thought (“Self-Consciousness” chapter), in order finally to arrive at models that seek to comprehend the unity of the two (“Reason” chapter).

40. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 183–184.

41. *Ibid.*, 177. This is the key point on which McDowell disagrees with Rorty.

42. As McDowell puts it: “a proposed exorcism is more satisfying to the extent that it enables us to respect, as insights, the driving thoughts of those who take the familiar philosophical anxieties to pose real intellectual obligations (or driving thoughts when we find ourselves beset by the anxieties), even while we unmask the supposed obligations as illusory . . . We can disown an obligation to try to answer the characteristic questions of modern philosophy, without needing to deny, as bald naturalism does, that a real insight is operative in seeming to be faced with that obligation” (*Mind and World*, xxii–xxiii). For a particularly relevant instance of this approach, see McDowell’s

response to Richard Rorty's suggestion that to avoid the impasses of the mind-body problem we must do away with the very distinction between terms referring to mental phenomena and those referring to the physical world: "Understanding the illusory obligations of traditional philosophy, which includes appreciating how the illusions can be gripping, requires that we understand the temptation to fall into this confusion. Hence it exactly requires that we not discard the distinction of batteries of concepts that so bothers Rorty, but rather that we understand it correctly, seeing through the temptation to misconceive it in the Cartesian way" (John McDowell, "The Constitutive Ideal of Rationality: Davidson and Sellars," in *Having the World in View*, 212–213). For a critical assessment of this aspect of McDowell's book and a contrast with Wittgenstein's deliberately ahistorical attempt at overcoming the philosophical tradition, see Michael Friedman, "Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell's *Mind and World*," *The Philosophical Review* 15, no. 4 (1996): 467.

43. J. G. Hamann, "Metacritique of the Purism of Reason," in *Johann Georg Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207.

44. Robert Pippin raises a similar consideration in defense of the Hegelian thesis about the "ineliminability of reflection" against Gadamer's critique: if Rousseau is right that alienation from our own life form is a constant possibility of the modern world, if, in other words, "the language of identity and alienation is as indispensable as the language of rights or the language of finitude in understanding the modern social and political world, then the Hegelian language of subjectivity, reflection, and Geist's 'reconciliation with *itself*' will also be ultimately indispensable" ("Gadamer's Hegel: Subjectivity and Reflection," in *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 94). Yet it is precisely the Hegelian aspiration for a speculative reconciliation that makes it difficult to see how we could "also" acknowledge finitude. I claim that if speculative reconciliation as Hegel conceived of it is no longer seen as a genuine possibility, then our ways of talking about the modern predicament will have to be closer to the Kantian model than to the Hegelian one.

45. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2010), 74–75 (translation modified).

46. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193–194 (A51/B75).

47. In the original German the passage reads: "Wir müssen ja Kant nicht deshalb so gründlich zu verstehen suchen, weil wir seine Probleme *haben*, sondern weil unsere Probleme ohne den Durchgang durch seine Lösungen nicht dieselben *wären*" (Hans Blumenberg, "Die Suggestion des beinahe Selbstgekonnten," in *Ein mögliches Selbstverständnis: Aus dem Nachlaß* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997], 90, emphasis in the original).

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